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LIUKENG — A FORGOTTEN VILLAGE

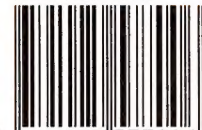
CHASING THE SEASON OF GOLD

HARD ROCK CAFE — BEIJING EDITION

DAOLANG DANCE IN MARKET

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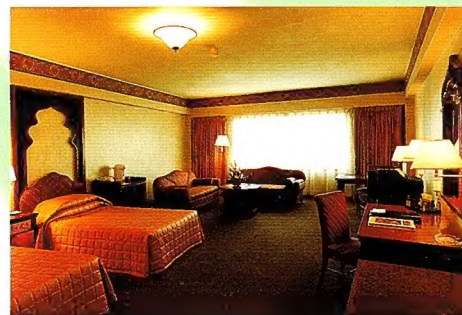
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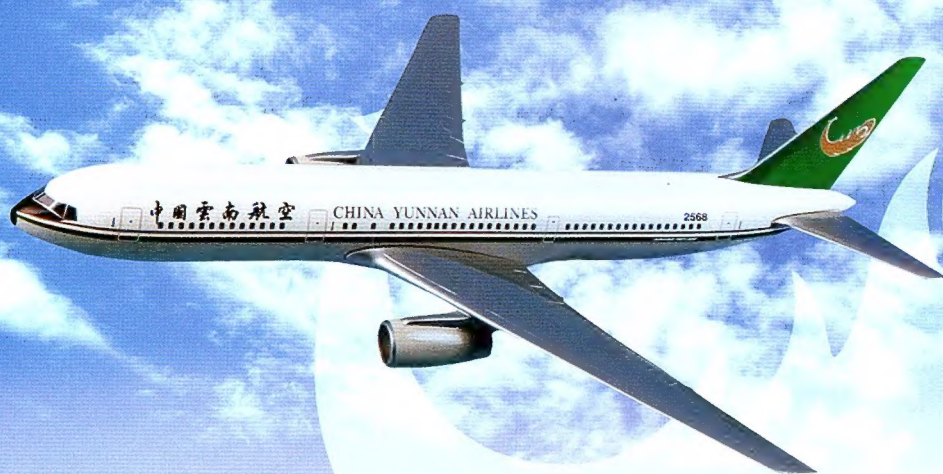
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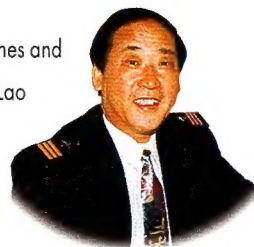
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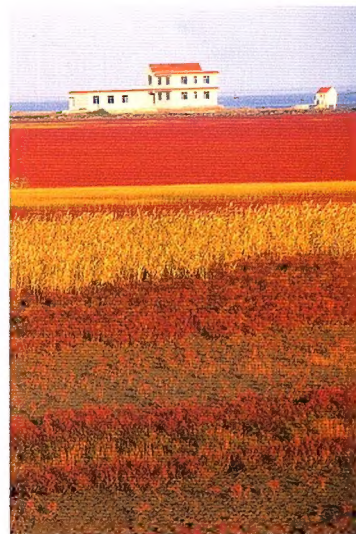
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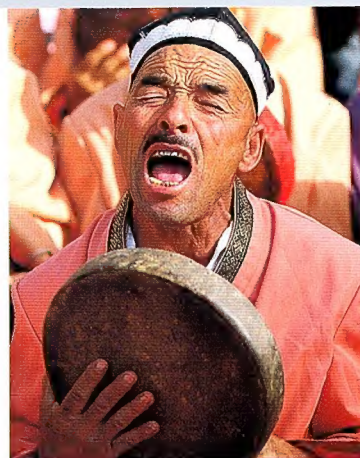
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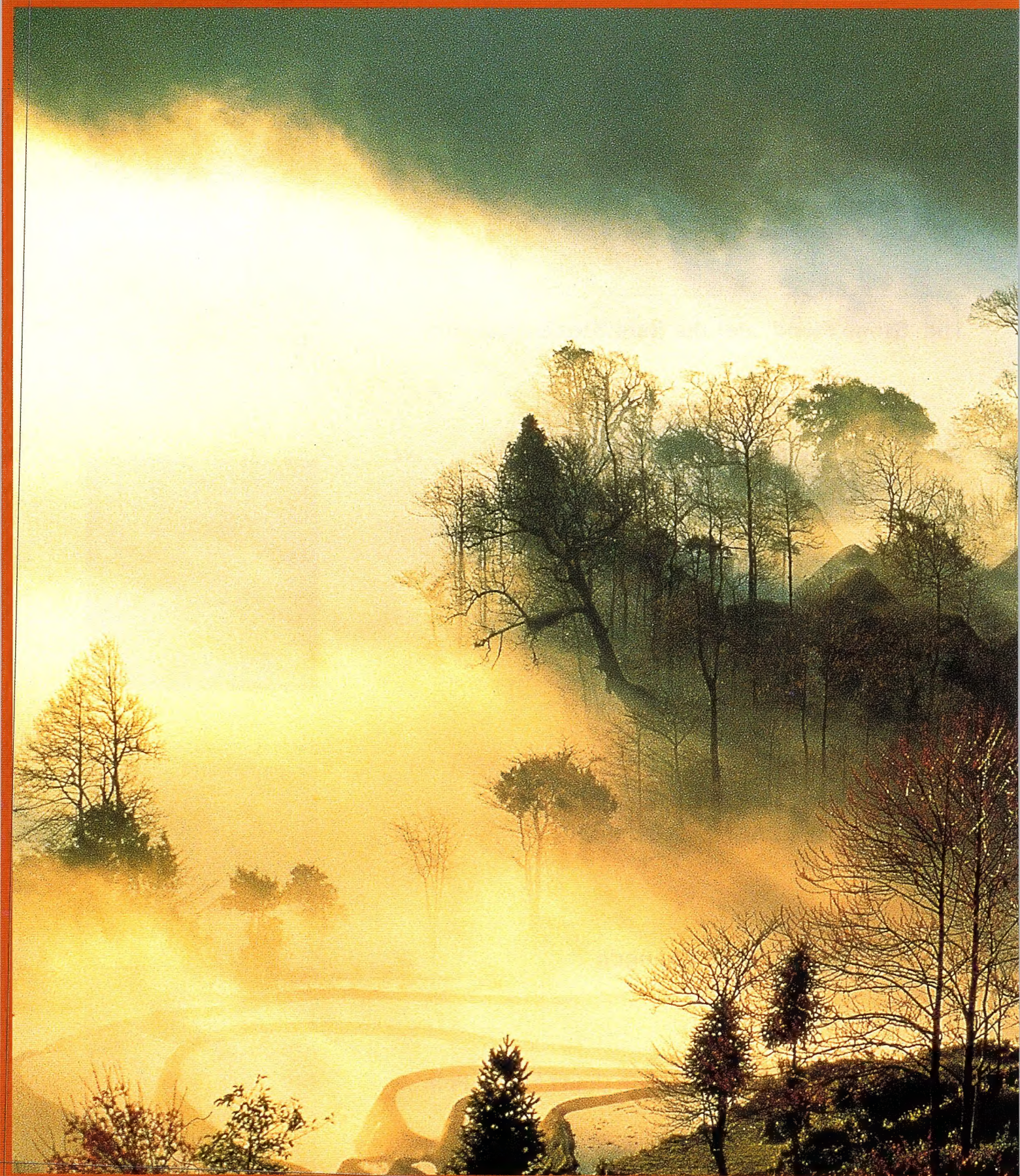
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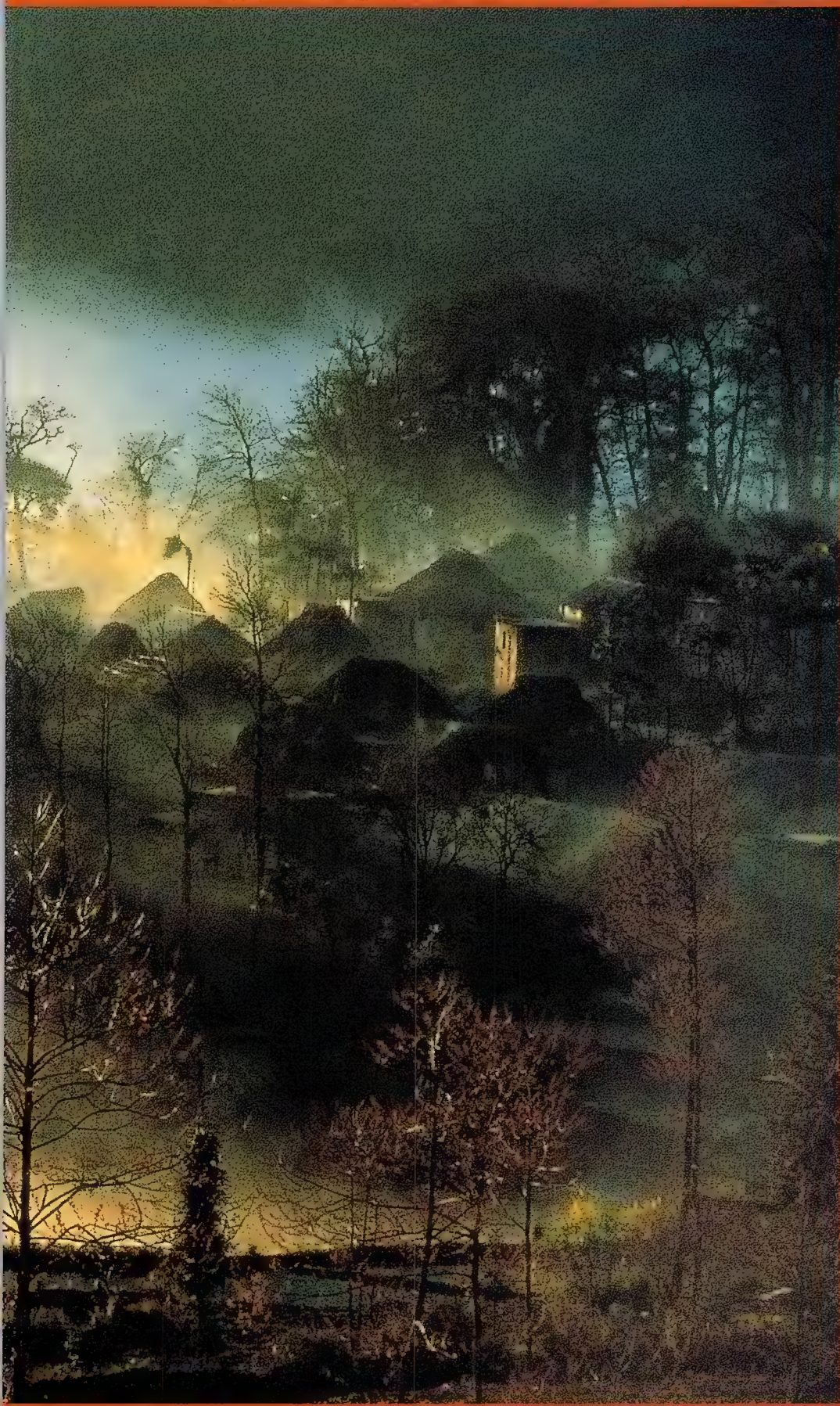
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Cover: A detail of a horizontal board found in Liukeng Village

Zhang Ximin






Misty Mountain Terraces

by Wang Yizhong

The land of Yunnan is familiar to many photographers. Besides the ethnic costumes of its local people, its landscapes, particularly the terraced slopes surrounding Ailao Mountain, are wonderful to behold.

The best time to photograph these is in March and April, when the work of replanting the sprouting rice has not yet begun. Looking down from the top of a hill you see the flooded terraces, layer upon layer, shimmering in the sunshine, almost silvery in reflection. In the early morning, the rays of the sun break through the fog and cloud, so that gradually only a little mist remains in the shaded hollows. This is a perfect time to shoot an idyllic picture. If you come across such a wonderful scene, the most important thing to do is to prepare your camera carefully. You should bear in mind that the light reading automatically indicated by the camera might not be accurate, due to the white clouds and mists. These readings could mislead you to under-exposing the picture. An experienced photographer would increase the aperture by one degree, as has probably been done in this picture. Also, by using the sunlight from behind, he has brought out the layers of cloud and fog in more depth, which makes the picture especially interesting. 



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FROM THE EDITOR

THE PROS AND CONS OF ISOLATION

Still alive in Jiangxi Province is an isolated ancient village called Liukeng. Flowing past it is the Enjiang River which, until recently, had been the only link between the village and the outside world. Up until the beginning of this century, many young hopefuls had travelled on this river to pursue their imperial careers outside their isolated birthplace and had come back as ministers and scholars. The annulment of the imperial examination system, through which the dynasties had recruited government officials, threw the village back into greater isolation.

This isolation has helped to shelter the village from wars; it has also made the villagers strongly self-reliant. Yet it has also deprived the village of many opportunities.

Roads built in the 70s linked Liukeng with the outside world. A new educated generation emerged in the 80s, and in the 90s, young people are leaving the village in large numbers to work or study in the cities. Some of them have returned and have revived the village's education and culture. The state of Liukeng village today reflects the current changes in China; people are taking initiatives to explore the outside world, digesting new information and making internal changes.

Photo by Wang Miao





H I G H L I G H T S

*Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning are
the three provinces of Northeast China. The area
has thick vegetation due to abundant rainfall
and fertile land. The great variations
in temperature bring out intense colour
in the mountain forests, especially in autumn.*

*Last year one of our reporters travelled
through the three provinces in
less than a month, so as to witness
the dramatic change of season in different places.*

Here he recounts what he saw.

CHASING AUTUMN IN NORTHEAST CHINA

Photos & Articles by Shan Xiaogang





THE GREATER HINGGAN MOUNTAINS

To catch the autumn season in Northeast China, you must choose the best time. I went in mid-September. I aimed for the northernmost part of China first, knowing that the autumn would strike here the earliest. I flew to Harbin, and from there took a train to Jiagedaqi, the nearest main town to the Greater Hinggan Mountains. Both Jiagedaqi and the mountains are in the north-eastern corner of Inner Mongolia. After a brief rest, I joined some locals to travel by jeep into the mountain range.

The first sign we saw of autumn was in the forests covering the highlands. We saw red pines appear orange in colour, while white birches seemed to rise like silver needles, with a few yellow leaves dangling from their branches in the autumn wind.

We then came to Targen, where we entered a boundless birch forest. The white birches seemed to form a large yellow blanket, extending to the far horizon. After passing northwards through Walaga and Xiluqi, we saw the fallen leaves, like a yellow robe, draped over entire mountain slopes. Forest trains, carrying timber, were coursing through the orange-coloured pines; squirrels were jumping amongst the trees seeking nuts, and timid roe deer peeped out from behind trees, only to disappear immediately.

When we came to the other side of Mengke Mountain, we found ourselves walking in a seemingly golden valley, with autumn trees on both sides. A wind suddenly arose and the leaves fell all around us like pieces of gold. At our feet were layer upon layer of these delicate yellow leaves, so beautiful that it made us feel guilty to walk on them.

Red Pine and Yellow Birch

Then there was the sight of the first autumn snow on the mountains. In the early morning of September 20, leaving Xilinji at the northern edge of the mountain range, we hurried to Mohe. There had been heavy snowfall the previous night, thickly covering the whole mountain and weighing down the tree branches. The brilliance of the yellow leaves was brought out even more against the background of white snow.

TRAVELLERS' TIPS

◆ **Best time to catch autumn** Mid-September.

◆ **Special features** The primeval forest in the Greater Hinggan Mountains consists mostly of larch and white birch trees, which is why the autumn colours of the forest are mainly orange and golden.

◆ **Points of Attention** The Greater Hinggan Mountains are located in the coldest area in China. The annual average temperature is -5°C and the temperature variations are enormous. Thick winter clothes are essential.

The "fire alert" period of the forest area starts on September 15 each year, and all the entrances to the forest have checkpoints. Tourists need to carry a "fireproof pass", or could be denied entry. You can apply for the pass at the local forestry bureau.

◆ **Transport** The forest area is huge, so you may find it better to enjoy the scenery on vehicles. There is a train (No. 213) to Jiagedaqi from Harbin, and from there there are two options: a) Change to train No. 671, which cuts right through the forested area. You may want to get off at some of the stations to enjoy the scenery on foot. b) Hire a jeep (about 300 yuan a day) to travel through the forest area along the Nenjiang-Mohe road. Likewise you could take some of the side roads for further exploration of the area. Both options would take about three days, with the return by train.

◆ **Accommodation** There are hotels and hostels generally found near the forest bureau. They also provide food and have reasonable facilities. Room rates are between 40 and 120 yuan.

◆ **Help network** Mr. Zou Xiangdong can be contacted at the Hinggan Mountains Tourist Bureau (tel: 0457-212 5605).

◆ **Shopping** This region produces especially nice Christmas ornaments, as well as jewellery boxes made of birch bark.

Previous page: Silver birch trunks standing against the autumn wind. The fledgling birch trees form a golden arbour leading to the edge of the horizon.

1. Birch bark can be made into lovely objects. 2. The holiday villas built among the forests are made of timber. 3. After a night's snowfall, the white birches become golden and silvery. 4. The train from Jiagedaqi enters the vast forest of the Greater Hinggan Mountains.



MOHE

After seeing the autumn snow on the Greater Hinggan Mountains, I felt somewhat at loss. In my experience, the autumn leaves usually become quite withered after each autumn precipitation.

I was afraid that the brilliance of autumn would be at an end. However, as we entered the "North Pole Village" in Mohe, I was relieved because the village is located in a valley

China and Russia Divide the Autumn River

where the altitude is relatively low. With mountains around as a natural barrier against the wind, it is warmer here than on the mountains.

Mohe Village is on the south bank of Heilongjiang River, which acts as the border with Russia on the other side. The houses in the village are mostly made of timber, surrounded by wooden stockade fences, which make them look like small strongholds. The host of the northernmost house was a man who had arrived here 11 years ago from Shandong. Since the government had forbidden the building of any more houses further north a year after his arrival, his house had become the house closest to China's border. Looking out through the window from his house it was possible to enjoy the autumn taking place in another country.

Early the next morning we went down to the river. The wind was bitterly cold, seeming to cut through my face and hands. When the sun rose, its golden rays were reflected everywhere, on the willows, on the cliffs and on the autumn forests.

We saw the villagers on the opposite side of the river lead their horses to drink water at the riverside. The men and the horses were both reflected in the water, which was an amazing sight. With the help of locals, we later boarded a motorboat and headed upstream. We later disembarked and climbed up a water tower and had a wonderful panorama of the river and surrounding scenery.

TRAVELLERS' TIPS

◆ **Best time to catch autumn** Mid-September.

◆ **Special features** The best autumn scenery is along the Heilongjiang River.

◆ **Transport** It's best to tour the river in a boat. Prices vary with different distances, but normally a return tour costs 30 yuan. A regular bus leaves at 1:30 p.m. from Xilinji to Mohe Village, and it takes about two hours to cover the distance of 87 kilometres. It costs you 250-300 yuan to hire a car there and back.

◆ **Help network** Contact Mr. Zhang Dianying at the Mohe County Tourist Bureau and the tourist representative at Beichui Hotel in Xilinji (tel: 0457-2883190).

◆ **Accommodation** There is a hostel in Mohe Village where the rate per person is 10-20 yuan each in autumn. Indoor heating is switched on in September. Freshwater fish is its culinary speciality.

◆ **Shopping** Interesting badges and coins are sold at post offices and shops.

◆ **Points of attention** Mohe Village is not called the "North Pole of China" for nothing, so thick clothes are needed. Since it is the border area, special "border passes" are needed for tourists. It's easiest to apply for one of these at Xilinji or sign up with a travel agent there.

1. Autumn over Xilinji.
2. The fishermen are busy catching fish before the river freezes over.
3. Autumn has dyed the forests red on the opposite bank in Russia.









SONGHUA LAKE

Thin Mist and Frosted Trees

As I had expected, autumn had already gone by the time I came back through the Greater Hinggan Mountains on our return journey. After only one night, the snow had melted and the tree leaves were now withered. Not wishing to stay longer, I hurried south to Jilin of Jilin Province.

After arriving in the city, I hired a jeep to go to Songhua Lake. The mountain peaks I could see were all covered with autumn trees, and looked like "coloured mountains", while Songhua Lake, with its many tiny islands covered in autumn trees, seemed ablaze with colour.

There was an autumn rain soon after our arrival. On the second day, the rain stopped and a mist formed. The whole lake was soon shrouded in cloud. It became extremely cold. In the thin mist, hotel villas looked like heavenly palaces in the clouds, and islets in the lake seemed like celestial islands on the sea. When the mist dispersed, white mountain peaks could be seen beyond the lake. There had been a frost. Behind me, the mountains were covered by frosted trees on the top and autumn trees at the bottom, a distinctive contrast of two seasons.

After the rain and frost, the sky turned blue again. We boarded a boat for a tour around the lake, exploring the islets one by one, relishing the scenery of the lake and the mountains around. We also found many rock formations and stunning peaks on these isles in the lake.

Buildings of different styles were on both sides, some by the lake, some on mountain slopes, whilst others were hidden deep in the autumn forests. The best ones were the European-style mountain villas. The best view of autumn was from Songhua Guesthouse and from the Foreign Trade Mountain Villa.

TRAVELLERS' TIPS

- ◆ **Best time to catch autumn** Around October 1.
- ◆ **Special features** Forest-covered mountains and the islets dotted on the lake.
- ◆ **Accommodation** Most of the villas and hotels here are closed after autumn. Only Songhua Lake Guesthouse, on the eastern side of the dam, is open all year round. It is a large-scale hotel, in a perfect location and with adequate facilities. The speciality of the area is freshwater fish. In autumn you may find there are low-season discounts.





◆ **Transport** Take a special bus from Jilin City to the lake area. Then you can take a taxi to Songhua Lake Guesthouse.

◆ **Points of Attention** The lake is located in the temperate zone and its climate is wet. The average annual temperature is 3-5°C. It's best to bring lots of woollen clothing.

1. The fishermen get big catches from the lake in autumn. 2. The islands on the lake.
3. The fish from Songhua Lake are delicious. 4. Autumn air under the eaves









HEAVENLY BRIDGE VALLEY

Red Maple All Over the Mountains

As we discovered that the autumn leaves were fading at Songhua Lake, we hurried over to Kuandian, in Liaoning Province. We visited Qingshan Lake and the White Rock there, and then went on to Heavenly Bridge (Tianqiao) Valley.

When we arrived there, there were signs of the first autumn frosts. The oak trees had withered, and of the birch trees, only their white trunks remained. But the maple trees were still in full glory, with leaves as red as spring flowers.

Maple is the predominant tree species in Heavenly Bridge Valley. Here you see them everywhere, on the mountains and in the valleys, all connecting with each other. The maple leaves make the whole mountain look red.

The remote Heavenly Bridge Valley has as yet been unaffected by any environmental pollution. The air is pure and the plants look incredibly alive. The streams carry the fallen maple leaves down to the lowlands, and the maple trees on the mountain slopes extend endlessly like a big red carpet.

TRAVELLERS' TIPS

◆ **Best time to catch autumn** Early October.

◆ **Special features** The State Forest Park of the Heavenly Bridge Valley, also known as "Lesser Mount Lushan", was opened to tourists only recently. Therefore the natural scenery is still beautifully intact. Probably this is the best place for enjoying autumn scenery in China.

◆ **Transport** There is a regular bus running to and from the Timber Yard of Heavenly Bridge Valley to Kuandian County town. The distance is 63 kilometres and it takes about two hours.

◆ **Accommodation** The Heavenly Bridge Guesthouse stands at the centre of the scenic area, with mountains surrounding it. Accommodation is basic, with dormitory beds, rather than rooms, for rent. The speciality of the area is its game and fowl.

◆ **Points of Attention** The weather in the valley often includes rain, so bring rainwear as well as warm clothes.

Previous page: The red and gold of the forest in Heavenly Bridge Valley

1. Maple leaves in the forest
2. Picking some maple leaves to take home
3. Autumn has attracted many painters here.



SHUANGTAIZI



"Red Carpet" Spread by the Sea

I continued my journey southwest along the coast of Liaoning to arrive at the river estuary called Shuangtaizi, near Panjin City. Climbing up the embankment built along the shore, I saw a land dyed in red lying in front of me like a red "carpet" extending out into the sea. This is the famous "Holy Carpet" or "red carpet". It is formed by a kind of semi-transparent algae, which begins to grow in June and becomes mature in full red in October and November. Autumn reeds grow from this massive tapestry, adding further colour and texture.

There are thousands of birds here for the rich source of food in this area. At sunset, the "holy carpet" turns into golden red as it reflects the setting sun, forming an amazing sight.

Early the next morning, we drove to the embankment again. At dawn, a red line appeared on the horizon, and the moon was still hanging high in the sky. The red clouds in the sky were reflected in the water, echoing the red of the "Holy Carpet". A few white cranes were walking on the "red carpet", sometimes raising their heads to the sky, and then lowering them again to find food, their graceful figures enhanced by the scenery.

TRAVELLERS' TIPS

◆ **Best time to catch the "red carpet"** October-November.

◆ **Special features** The reed marshes cover a total area of over 50,000 hectares. You can see many rare birds, such as the red-crested crane, the white crane and the black-peck gull.

◆ **Transport** You can take a bus from Shenyang to the sea, with the whole journey being about 3-4 hours.

◆ **Accommodation** You can stay in the Holy Carpet Pavilions on the beach, but you have to bring your own food and drinking water. Otherwise, there is Panjin city, a new petroleum industry centre, about 30 kilometres away. It has reasonable accommodation, but you may be discouraged by the industrial environment.

◆ **Climate** Mild. Bring with you temperate autumn clothes.



Translated by M.Q.

1. You need wellington boots to walk on the "red carpet".

Next page: Red weeds and yellow reeds combine to form a colourful large carpet.



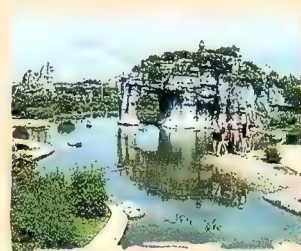
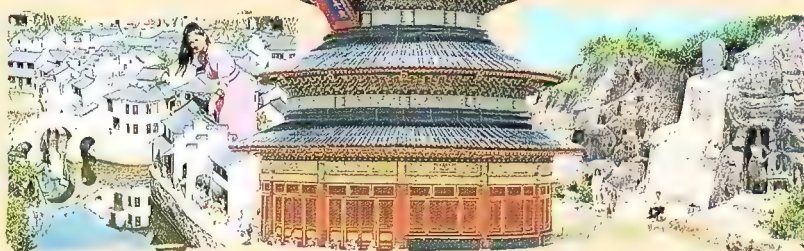
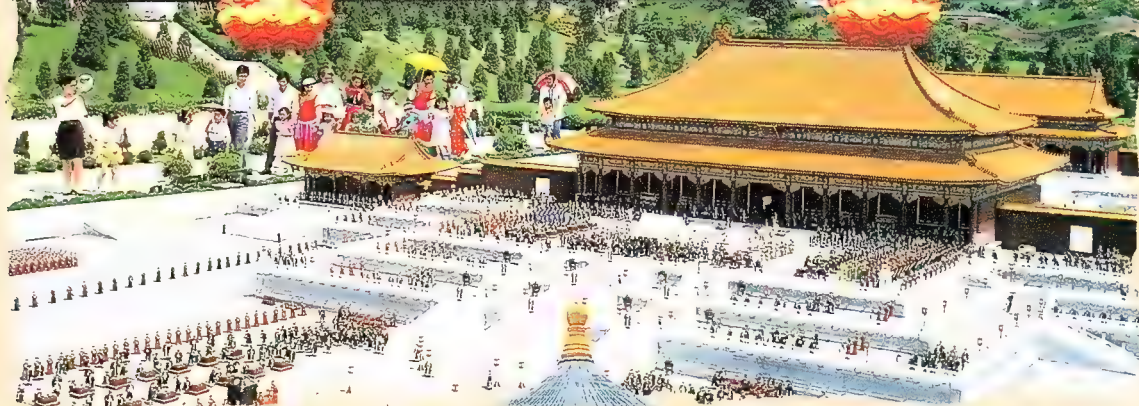


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乾隆十亥夏月

DISCOVERIES

LIUKENG

Photos & Article by Zhang Xinyin

— An Ancient Village Untouched by

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There is a village in Jiangxi Province which has recently attracted a lot of attention. Having newly discovered the village, scholars and specialists they have been amazed at the ancient community which seems to have been caught in a time capsule. Established over 1,000 years ago, it has remained virtually unaffected by the outside world. It still retains its original architecture and its ancient customs. This remote mountain community has, until recently, been unheard of and is still hard to reach.

Its recent discovery has something to do with a man called Zhou Luanxin. A retiree from the Information Department in Jiangxi Province, he became fascinated with the small village. For nine years he has been visiting and studying the ancient community. The trips have resulted in his writing a newspaper article and then a book on his findings there.

Hard to Reach – Even Today

Drawn by the village and moved by Mr. Zhou Luanxin's fascination with it, I decided to go and see for myself. Naturally I had some doubts too: could a village be that fascinating?

I boarded a train running between Beijing and Kowloon, a service which has been launched recently. Once on the train, I studied a map of Jiangxi. To reach Le'an, the nearest town to Liukeng, I had to disembark either at Ji'an or a smaller train station called Badu. Finally I chose Badu which seemed nearer to Le'an on the map. When I arrived at Badu, a small town in Jishui County, I found out there was no direct bus service to

Le'an. It did not seem to have helped that I had opted for the nearest town, less than 100 kilometres from it. I found out that I would have been better off having opted for the larger town of Ji'an. It was necessary from Badu to change buses at Yongfeng. Here I waited by the roadside for a bus running between Ji'an and Le'an. The bus which finally came had no more room for passengers as it was already packed with young people returning home from work in Guangdong, the neighbouring province. I determinedly squeezed my way onto it. It had been less than 80 kilometres from Badu to Le'an, but it had taken more than seven hours to travel. I later learned that I had to go to Niutian Town first the next day and try to reach Liukeng from there. Even with the Beijing-Kowloon Railway opened, it is still incredibly difficult to get to this area. I could not help wondering what being so isolated meant to a place.

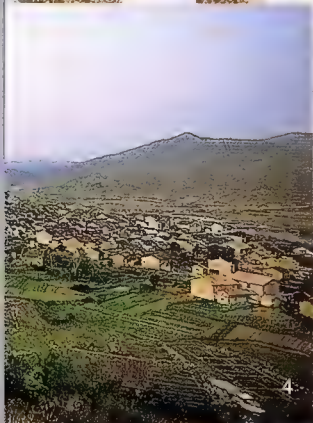
An Escort to Liukeng

The next day I arrived in Niutian. When people in the street learned how far I had come especially to see Liukeng, they took me to meet Mr. Rao, the head of the town. Impressed with my deep interest in Liukeng, he soon opened up and became very talkative. He brought out a thick stack of documents and listed the glories of the village since its founding, such as the number of distinguished graduates of imperial examinations. In recent years, he told me, the village had become increasingly famous, and almost every day there had been visitors there. Just then, two people who had come to study Liukeng came in and Mr. Rao got in his jeep to take the three of us to Liukeng.

It was nine kilometres from Niutian to Liukeng. The road meandered along the Enjiang River and was flanked by camphor trees. Although more than 100 years old, their thick foliage still shaded the highway. Mr. Rao told us that these trees were unique to the area. The Enjiang River makes a sudden 90 degree turn at the village. This has caused the river to form a deep pool, where the water is so clear that the rocks can be seen lying at the bottom. On the shore stood a



1. A cobbled street in Liukeng Village
2. Detail on a roof of an ancient house. Half of the houses in the village were constructed during the Ming and Qing dynasties.
3. An old well
4. Liukeng Village viewed from a distance
5. One of the seven quays which link the village with the outside world via the Enjiang River





large cluster of ancient buildings. We climbed up on the opposite bank to get a good view of Liukeng, which has seven streets running from left to right, crossed by one main street running perpendicularly to them. The layout looked worthy of modern town planner. Mr. Rao took us to the steps on the riverbank, where village women were washing clothes. The occasional raft, made of bamboo, sailed by. For a period of over 1,000 years, it seems that the Enjiang River was the only communications route between Liukeng and the outside world.

A Showcase of Antique Buildings

After he had introduced us to the head of the village, Mr. Dong Shaosheng, Mr. Rao left us. Mr. Dong, in his 30s, had previously served in the army and was well-informed about the outside world. He volunteered to help us carry our photographic equipment as he took us around the village. On both sides of the cobbled lanes stood ancient houses, complete with Ming and Qing architectural features. This was a rare sight to see anywhere in China today, let alone in a small village such as this.



There were several hundred ancient buildings, including ancestral temples, private schools, and numerous memorial buildings in the form of pavilions, large halls or archways. These edifices were each inscribed with the calligraphy of famous writers throughout the dynasties. Almost every household had its own set of ancient memorial tablets, some of which, rather sadly, had been used to build pigsties. Seeing how alarmed I was at this, Mr. Dong Shaosheng informed me that when he had been at school there had in fact been many more ancient sites and relics still intact in the village. At the time, aged camphor trees had



1. One-third of the Liukeng houses are decorated with calligraphy works like this.
2. This family book has been handed down from the Ming Dynasty.
3. Stone lions are often found guarding the more magnificent houses in the village.
4. The ceremonial parade of worshipping gods and ancestors is held annually on the 24th day of the lunar 12th month.
5. This wing house was built for the concubine of the family head.





stretched from the riverside away into the distance, and they had grown so close together that the women washing clothes at the river had not had to worry about any sunlight reaching their skin. However, now the number of trees had been reduced significantly, and many ancient cultural relics had been scattered or ruined. What had been the reason for all this? The first had been that of poverty, and the second, ignorance. It was not until 1989, after Mr. Zhou Luanxin had published a book on the place, that local authorities began to attach any importance to the village. The State Cultural Relics Administration then had sent specialists to investigate and study the local antiquities. Subsequently the local people realised the objects' significance and regretted their previous neglect of them.



Ancient Ceremonies Still Practised

Again, unique to Liukeng, almost everyone there has the same sur-name, Dong. This is because for several hundred years the Dong clan has maintained the tradition of having a close-knit community, cut off from the outside world. This isolationist practice may have not helped enhance exchanges with other communities, but it certainly helped the village avoid wars and destruction. This is a key factor of how the village has managed to maintain its ancient appearance and traditions.

Holding ceremonies offering sacrifices to their ancestors is the most important ritual to the Dong clan. On the same date in the lunar calendar (usually in late January or very early February) every year, clan members parade the lanes, carrying tablets which depict family gods. Walking in the front are the clan's guards of honour, and behind, the musicians. Whenever the parade (which stops outside every household) comes to a house, the whole family comes out to greet them. They set off firecrackers, light incense, kow-tow, and pray for good weather and luck in the coming year for the family. The great fanfare in fact begins the night before, when the most senior members of the clan and the head of each extended family gather at the ancient theatre hall. They conduct prayers, light incense and slaughter animals as sacrifices to



1. Pillars of the Dongs' former ancestral temple, which was burnt to the ground in 1927
2. Small millstones are still widely used as part of the local's self-sufficient life.
3. Playing ancient coins, a popular game in the village
4. The few TV sets here serve as windows to the outside world.



their gods. Then they carry the memorial tablets to the cemetery on the other side of the river, where they parade throughout the night. The Dongs proudly told me that they had a long history in China and that their family had extended all over the country.

I was fortunate enough to see a copy of the Dong family history book, written during the Ming Dynasty. The book not only lists the history of the family, but also records clan disciplines, the surrounding natural environment, layout of houses, major social events, number of domesticated animals and properties, weddings and funerals, living conditions, customs and habits as well as geographic and astronomic conditions seen at Liukeng Village. In short, it is tantamount to an encyclopaedia of ancient customs and culture in China. Dong Haixing told me that he had had two motives in allowing me and other journalists to photograph the family book: first, to show his trust in us, and second, in the hope that we would publicise the Dongs and their village.

Dong Haixing has a son whose name has the exact same Chinese characters as that of the chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. This Dong Jianhua (rather than Tung Chee Hwa, the Hong Kong way of pronouncing the same Chinese characters), the 38th generation of the Dong at Liukeng, is now in grade five at primary school. Dong told me that his son's name was chosen according to rules in the family tree book. In Liukeng, where there is a population of over four thousand, there are not many television sets, but the name of the Hong Kong chief executive is well-known here. Many people in the village are convinced that his family roots are in Liukeng.

The Pros and Cons of Self-sufficiency

During my days in Liukeng I stayed in the former village hall, and ate with Dong Shuisheng and his family across the street. Every morning, Dong Shuisheng or his wife go shopping in the market. There is also a pharmacy, tailor, jeweller's shop, a barber and a few non-staple food stores. All common daily necessities can be found here, and many of them are locally produced. The locals also make their own firecrackers, candles, glutinous ricecakes for the New Year, sofas, bricks and tiles, sweets, and even clothes pegs. They live completely self-sufficiently. The habit of producing for themselves everything they need has enabled the villagers to live independently, without outside help, for centuries. It has also engendered a peaceful, though not wealthy, life and relationships of mutual help and harmony. On the other hand, the absence of contact with outsiders has also deprived them of the opportunity to develop the economy and to rejuvenate their culture.

Liukeng in Transition

This situation has begun to change in recent years. With an increasing population ever diminishing the amount of land available to each person to farm, large numbers of young people have been compelled to look outside the village for work. When they return, they also bring with them the desire, as well as ideas, to develop the local economy and to modernise Liukeng.

During my stay at Liukeng, I was often deeply impressed by its rich cultural and historical legacy. How could a village so isolated from the outside world have produced so many famous scholars? And what was it that made Liukeng lose its glamour and fame in the last 100 years?



1. Villagers like to gather at the pharmacy shops during their spare time.
2. These jars contain the rice wine Shuisheng has brewed.
3. Cultural relics preserved in a household
4. A deserted ancient private school.

I went into a dilapidated former private school where some children were playing. In fact, what had remained of the school was mostly broken houses. Dong Shuisheng had asked me to look at one of the ceilings which was still preserved, on which exquisite patterns were still visible. He told me that for several hundred years no cobwebs had been seen on that ceiling. Apparently there were several schools like this in the village. There had been as many as 28 of them during the Ming Dynasty. The importance placed on learning at



that time was obvious. The ancestors of today's villagers in Liukeng not only fully understood, but actively practised, the tradition of "he who excels in learning can be an official." They would dispatch many hopeful imperial examinees who would later return with the glory of having had a successful career, and then would make contributions to the development and prosperity of their hometown. Certainly the old system of achieving official positions through excelling in the imperial examinations had brought Liukeng centuries of wealth and status.

Compared with their early predecessors, the villagers of recent times have been much less successful. At the entrance of the village, I talked to several young people and was surprised to learn that some of them had never been to school. The graffiti I saw was in poor handwriting and full of mistakes, forming a sharp contrast to the excellent calligraphy I had seen on the memorial tablets.





1

It seems that there have been many factors which have resulted in the village's decline. However, apart from its physical isolation, I believe that the most important reason was the abolition of the imperial examination system which removed the traditional means of achievement for the locals. Consequently, education ceased to be of importance to them. This then led to a change in their lifestyle. The sons and grandsons of former officials turned to farming as a living.

New Hope

Next to the ruins of the Dongs' Ancestral Temple which is a primary school, where I met and chatted with a school teacher. He was a graduate of the same school where he now teaches. Having graduated as a teacher elsewhere, he returned in 1991. He told me that, in the past decade, the village had begun to prioritise education again, and more than 20 people had entered or graduated from universities or colleges.

Leaving the school, I went to take photos of the front of a house. A young lady came out and warmly invited me in. I was later surprised by what I saw inside. There were 31 children having a class. This was a private school for pre-school children. The teacher, 25 years old, had worked outside the village and then returned to start this school in her own home. She told me that there was one other private pre-school in the village. Seeing her and her students, the future of Liukeng looked bright. The fact that parents were willing to spend part of their limited resources to have their children receive such early education could mean a revival of culture and education in the village.

Two Bottles of Wine and One Wish

The last evening I was in Liukeng, Dong Shuisheng invited me for a drink. He also made a few dishes to go with the wine. He urged me to drink from large bowls almost as if he did not mind me drinking all the wine he had brewed. Our drinking session lasted a while and we had a lot to talk about.

I would have certainly missed the bus the next morning if Dong Shuisheng had not come to wake me. Before the bus left, he handed me two bottles of his home-brew. As the bus pulled away, I heard Dong say: "Don't forget to write about us at Liukeng."



Translated by F. Huang

1. The 78-year-old Dong Zhaorong, who graduated from a teachers' school in the 1940s, takes the responsibility of taking notes for the family history book and writing couplets for the villagers.
2. A primary school beside the ruins of the Ancestral Temple.
3. In these pre-school kids, one sees the hope of Liukeng Village.



The Glories of Liukeng Village

Article by Zhou Luanshu



Experts inspecting a Ming-dynasty well

Liukeng has a history of more than 1,000 years since the village first emerged there during the reign of Shengyuan (937-964) in the Five Dynasties period. Although most of the villagers have the family name of Dong, a minority have family names such as Zeng and He. The Dongs venerate Dong Zhongshu, a well-known Confucian scholar of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-24) as the founder of the clan.

In the initial years of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), Dong Wenguang, the third generation of the Dongs, established a school to teach children in the family. This was what laid the ground for the emergence of so many scholars and officials to be groomed here, especially during the years when imperial examinations had the greatest importance in society. The Five-Champion Archway in Liukeng is built in memory of five uncles and nephews in the Dong family who all came top in an imperial examination in 1034, achieving the title of metropolitan graduates, an achievement rarely seen in history. During the Qing Dynasty, Dong Guangqian repeatedly took the imperial examinations till he was 99 years old and Emperor Tongzhi, so impressed with the old man, bestowed on him the title of metropolitan graduate.

According to the Dong's family history book, more than 200 members of the clan achieved high academic titles and were qualified to be recruited as civil servants. During the Song Dynasty (960-1279), over a hundred people from the village became court officials such as prime ministers, chief secretaries, court recorders and instructors. Others became experts in various fields, including ethics, classics, literature, calligraphy, medicine and even martial arts. Academic works written by the Dongs at Liukeng during the Ming Dynasty alone numbered 38 titles.

It was Dong Sui who, in the mid-Ming period, changed the original layout of Liukeng to a neat arrangement of parallel streets with one running across them. A lake was dug outside the village and sewage ditches built to collect rainwater and effluence and then discharge it into the Enjiang River. This was a significant innovation in sanitation in those days, and Liukeng people still benefit from it today. The village, which was like a walled city, was also protected by the Enjiang River and Dragon Lake.

Among the more than 500 buildings of a wide range of architectural styles, over half of them date back to the Ming and Qing dynasties. There are over 20 Ming-dynasty structures, 50 ancestral halls, eight temples, a cultural hall and a theatre. Most residential houses have two storeys, with the upper floor used for storage of family belongings and the ground floor as living space. Door frames, partition panels, walls, ceilings and even eaves on the roofs are carved or painted, sometimes both.

At least one-third of the buildings in Liukeng are decorated with couplets written on both sides of the doors that usually refer to the family background, their achievements or give the good wishes to the family.

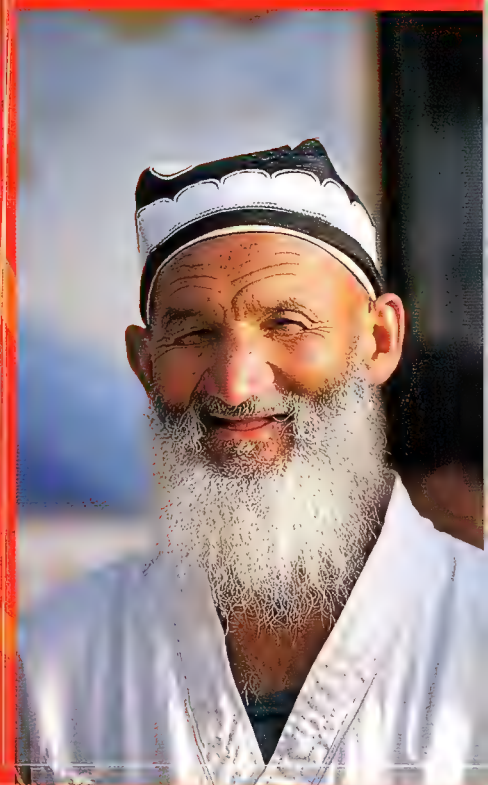
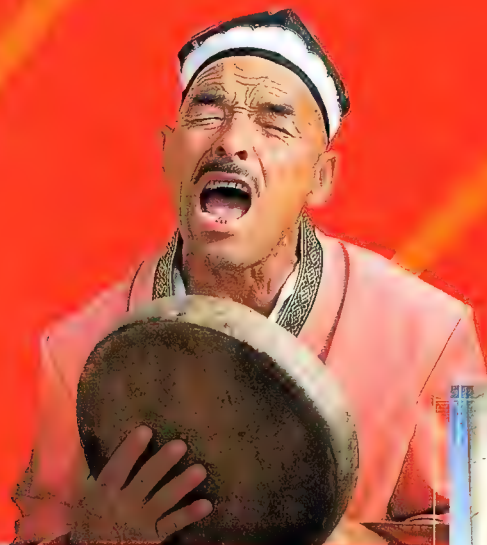
Interestingly, most of the couplets show the handwriting of famous calligraphers such as Zhu Xi of Southern Song Dynasty and Yang Shiqi of the Ming Dynasty.

Translated by F. Huang

Traveller's Tips

How to get there: From Shenzhen or Nanchang (capital of Jiangxi Province), board a train to Beijing and alight in Ji'an. Then take a long-distance bus to Le'an, from where there is a minibus that will carry you to Liukeng village.

Lodging: Once in Liukeng, there are only villagers' homes to stay in; otherwise you could find a guesthouse in Niutian Town (9 kilometres away).



THE DAOLANG DANCE FESTIVAL

photos & article by Shi Bao



C U S T O M S







It is said that the customs in Southern Xinjiang are typical of the Uygur people.

This is true in every aspect, including food, costumes, utensils, musical instruments, songs and dance. Everything that happens in this part of Xinjiang carries a stronger Uygur identity than in the rest of the region. The Daolaji Dance of Market is one of its most attractive features.

It is said that no matter where the dance takes place, everyone who sees it wants to join in. When we watched the Daolaji dance in early autumn, we discovered what they meant.

"Hot Whirlwind" in the Oasis

Markit, the home of Daolang Dance, is an oasis that lies on the western edge of the vast Taklimakan Desert. On learning that a dance festival would be held there in late September, we hastened over to attend it. We started off by bus from Ürümqi and the journey took two days. At sunset we reached the oasis, which is surrounded by the yellow sand of the desert.

That evening we enjoyed a welcome dinner underneath a trellis of grapevines. It was early autumn, and melons and other fruits were ripe. Wedges of watermelon, *hami* melon, honeydew melon, apples, pears, grapes and figs, were all laid out on a deep red carpet together with crisp cakes. After a few cups of mellow wine, we talked about the Daolang Dance, born in Markit.

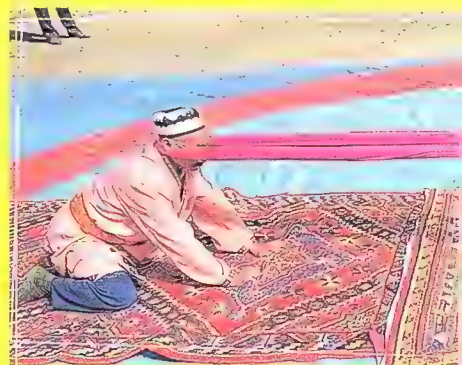


In ancient times there had been no oasis in the area, but instead there were undulating sand dunes, where poplars, willows and camel thorns grew, and wild animals lived. A branch of the ancient Huigu nationality (today's Uyghur,) known as Daolangute, lived in this region. They were what we call the Daolang people today. Instead of farming, the Daolang people lived as hunters and herders. As they often went out in groups into the vast desert, they created a dance with rhythms reflecting the elements there, such as the whirlwinds. In Markit today, people dance at festivals, weddings, celebrations of good harvest, or as a way to welcome friends from far away.

The Festival Begins

Early the next morning we were woken by the sound of lively *suona* music and the beating of drums. The music was coming from a large square which was beautifully decorated and crowded with people. Some men and women, wearing colourful caps or scarves, stood around the edge of the square. Three drummers and two *suona* players sat on top of a high wall on the outside of the square, making music and singing songs as a way of summoning people to come to the festival which was about to begin.

Several thousand doves were released into the sky, and the floats in the middle of the square began to form a parade. On some of the cars were musicians, while on



others which celebrated the harvest, the Uyghur men and women displayed watermelons, *hami* melons, various kinds of fresh fruit, corn, cotton, rice and sunflowers that they had just picked from the fields. The corn, cotton, rice and sunflowers still had the leaves and roots intact.

Young Horse-Riders and Falcon Carriers

Behind the floats was a formation of over 100 revving motorbikes. In an instant, the smoke from their engines covered up the sky over the square. This group was followed by a long formation of horses. All the horses were of the tall, military Ili breed and the riders were strong young men, wearing white shirts and colourful caps. The riders in the last two columns of the contingent were each carrying a falcon on their arm. They were meant to resemble the ancient Daolang people hunting in the desert.

Before the cheers died away there was a peal of laughter from the crowd, as over a dozen men, in fancy dress as horses, came past. Wearing women's stockings on their four legs, they swaggered about, looking very comical.

Old Men's Songs Ringing High in the Sky

When the parade was over, there was an energetic chorus of songs to music produced by *suona*, drums and fiddles. We walked up to the music platform and saw about 100 musicians and singers, most of whom were men of at least 60 years old. Their faces glowed with health, and they beat the drums in their hands quickly and rhythmically.





Their necks were extended as they sang from the bottom of their lungs, with their eyes closed and grey moustaches quivering.

The Dance Begins

With the melodious music and songs from the old singers, the crowd of nearly 1,000 people started to dance. They first stretched their arms and swayed gracefully from the waist as if they were riding leisurely on horseback, and then changed to waving their



hands as if they were parting tall grass to search for wild animals. Then, as the music accelerated, they quickened their steps to suggest that they had found the prey and were giving chase to it... The dance ended with everyone turning round in rapid circles, indicating the celebration of a good day's hunting.

The Tug-of-War from the Neck

After the dancing, various other activities and contests started.



First, young men and women waged a tug-of-war. Then two thin old men tied a long silk ribbon around the back of their necks and started a tug between each other to see whose neck was tougher. They did not stop until one side had pulled the other beyond the boundary line. This contest does not take place anywhere else in China. It is a pastime unique to Markit.

Later on, two rams were led to the square to start a fight head to head. The crowd were very involved in this contest because most of the village had placed bets on it.

At the end of the day, the old musicians went again to sit on top of the high earthen walls and once more



started playing music and singing songs. Amidst their *suona* music and the beating of drums, some people left the square to return home. But the young men and women did not go home straightaway, instead, they gathered under the grape trellises and continued to dance, eat, drink, and chat until daybreak the next morning.

TRAVELLER'S TIPS

To get to Markit Take plane or long-distance bus from Urümqi to Kashgar, and then catch a bus going to Markit. There are flights between Urümqi and Kashgar everyday. The journey is two hours by plane, but over two days by bus.

Accommodation There are several hotels providing standard rooms. The charge is around 100 yuan a day. The food is mainly in Xinjiang style (hot and spicy), but there are also Sichuan restaurants.

Translated
by Xiong Zhenru



A Night at the Hard Rock Cafe in Beijing

Photos & Article by Zhai Dongfeng





A street in old Beijing reverberates with the cries of a street peddler. In the depths of some dark *hutong*, someone is singing Peking Opera in measured, rhythmical tones. Nearby, the powerful, pulsating beat of rock music bursts upon the ear with great intensity. This juxtaposition of such diverse rhythms, of traditional and modern, typifies the striking contrasts existing in Beijing today.

A stone stairway, built in the fashion of a piano keyboard, leads to the spacious hall of the Hard Rock Cafe. The powerful sounds of rhythm and blues resonate against the walls, which are graced with pictures and mementos of famous song artists such as Michael Jackson, Elvis Presley and the Beatles.

Where Beijing's 'New Generation' Mingle with Americans

Every evening at dusk, the cafe comes alive. A band plays and the dance floor becomes packed with people. Immersed in this atmosphere, whilst enjoying authentic American food, one tends to forget where one is.

1. The band in action at the Hard Rock
2. The ceiling is covered with portraits of music stars.
3. The whole interior celebrates American pop music.





The Hard Rock Cafe has become the place to be among Beijing's high achievers. Westerners residing in Beijing, particularly Americans, also go there. The pull of such a classically American venue, existing in a place of such different cultural background like Beijing, proves irresistible.

Long before you set foot in there, it is possible to hear the beat of the music from inside. On two floors, the ground floor has a bar, stage and dance floor (which doubles as a dining area), whilst upstairs there is a quieter bar and restaurant.

How the Hard Rock Began

Despite its location in the heart of China, the Hard Rock Cafe has retained its American feel. From its models of a sports car and giant guitar, hoisted above the front gate, which has become its trademark, to the ornaments hanging inside on the walls, everything is a showcase of classic American rock culture.

1. An ideal place for people looking for a few hours of fun
2. A couple enjoying the American fare on offer
3. Authentic American food served at the Hard Rock

The brand design dates back more than 20 years. In 1971, two Americans living in London searched every restaurant for the authentic American food that they were craving. When they failed to find any, they decided to pool



their own money and to open their own authentic American restaurant. They opened their first restaurant, the Hard Rock Cafe, just outside Hyde Park. Eric Clapton, the celebrated singer, soon became a regular patron. Finding the cafe somewhat lacking in interior decoration, he donated his favourite guitar to them. Pete Townsend, a member of The Who pop group, later followed suit by contributing his own guitar. Soon it became the cafe's tradition to collect authentic souvenirs from famous song artists and to put them on display in the restaurant.



Michael Jackson's Signed Gloves

The originality of the Hard Rock Cafe's interior decor has proved an enormous component of its success. Among the 400 or so ornaments which were carefully chosen for decorating the Beijing branch, the most precious ones are perhaps a pair of gloves autographed by Michael Jackson and a picture showing him wearing the gloves. As a famous musical establishment, the cafe certainly cannot do without souvenirs related to the Beatles and Elvis Presley. These include a 45-inch gold album of the Beatles, and another bearing Presley's signature. The cafe's horde of treasures also includes a mobile electronic keyboard which Elton John had used in his early days, a copy of the *Gibson Blues' King* album signed by B.B. King, and a jacket that a Prince band member had worn in the movie *Purple Rain*.

The cafe itself is well-conceived in design. The floor space takes the shape of a giant guitar, and the staircase is designed to look like a piano.

1. The bar's guitar-shaped shop sign
2. Giant sports car, one of the trademarks of the Hard Rock Cafe







keyboard. The ceiling is covered with a painting of major Western song artists and the huge tinted glass screen behind the stage is etched with images of rock music stars.

Authentic American Food

The food served in the cafe is typical American fare. These include buffalo wings, HRC's famous grilled fajitas, hamburgers, apple and cinnamon rolls, and chocolate and walnut cakes. Servings are also classically American - they are generous!

The Hard Rock Cafe operates its own souvenir stores with stock ranging from rock stars' guitars, clothes and gold albums, to the T-shirts, sweaters, cowboy clothes, baseball caps, umbrellas, badges, watches and key rings, all bearing the HRC emblem.

The cafe is situated in the Liangmahe Building at 8 North Road, Third Ring Highway East.

1. A couple sitting by the frets of the huge guitar
2. The spacious dining area
3. Gifts to the cafe from superstar Michael Jackson



Translated by Ling Yuan



We all know the taste of Italian pizza. But have you ever tried nang, the delicious thin bread from Xinjiang?

Nangs have been a staple food of the Xinjiang people for over 2,000 years. The process of making one is similar to that of preparing bread. A

little salt, water and yeast is mixed with flour, kneaded thoroughly, left to ferment for a few minutes, then baked in the oven. Ovens of varying sizes are built in family kitchens in Xinjiang. An average one is about one metre high with a small round door at the top and rounded walls inside. A fire is made at the bottom of the oven, and the dough is baked by sticking it on the oven walls to cook. A nang is best tasted when fresh out of the

NANG — THE XINJIANG PIZZA

Photos by Shi Baoxiu Article by Xiao Su

oven; it is deliciously crispy.

There are 50 kinds of nang. Here are just some examples:

Sesame nang: Shown by the woman (above left), this kind is generally the largest made. Sesame seeds are mixed with grape juice when making the dough, which makes for a toasted and also tangy flavour when baked.

Aimank: This can have a diameter of up to 50 centimetres. It is said that it takes a kilogram of flour to make one. Often decorated with patterns at the centre, the *aimank* is thin and crispy in the middle, and thick and soft at the edge.

Jirde: This is the thickest variety. Five to six centimetres thick, it has a hole made in the centre.

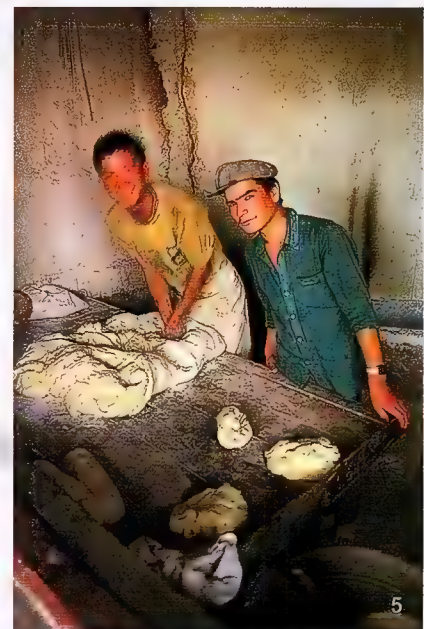
Tokaxi: The smallest of all Xinjiang nangs, a *tokaxi* is only one centimetre thick and as large as the diameter of a cup. It is often elaborately made.

Meat nang: Minced mutton, onion and seasonings are added to the dough before baking. The result is exceptionally tasty and aromatic.





1. Do you think you could manage this nang?
2. *Aimank* nangs.
3. Nangs are the staple of most meals in Xinjiang.
4. Nangs can be bought from the side of the street.
5. Two young bakers preparing nangs.
6. A nang oven



The Uyghurs enjoy their Xinjiang version of pizza in many ways. Some soak their nang in watermelon juice, which makes for a lovely salty and sweet taste, and is especially good in summer. Some people dip the bread in milk tea. It is customary in Xinjiang for newlyweds to eat a nang together, to symbolise their commitment to stay together for the rest of their lives. Nangs can be enjoyed in a wide variety of ways, and form the basis of many meals in Xinjiang.

Nangs can be stored for many days without going bad. For this reason, the locals often take some with them when they make a journey. It is said that Monk Xuanzang of the Tang Dynasty managed to cross the Gobi desert with the help of these as staple food. Perhaps you might choose to take some with you on your tour of Xinjiang.

©

Translated by Ling Yuan



A Shopping Street in Guangzhou

The Qingping Market




Built in the late 1970s the Qingping Market located on Qingping Road at Liwan, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, was in its early days the main venue for market stalls selling only vegetables, poultry, fish, meat and grains. Over 20 years later it has become a one-kilometre-long market covering an area of about one hectare with several thousand stands, all with a counter, handling a rich assortment of goods which include aquatic products, seafood, game, dried fruit, flowers, birds, medicinal herbs, tobacco, tea-sets, ancient coins and antiques from all over the country.

Walking along the road I found the medicine market to be the largest with dozens of stores selling several hundred varieties of medicinal herbs and animals from all parts of the country. In the aquatic market, as well as all sorts of seafood, there are also big tortoises, each weighing 40 kilogrammes or more.

Pausing at one stand I saw customers trading "money-for-money" with the vendor. They were buying ancient coins and banknotes which included copper coins of the Tang, Song and Ming dynasties, silver dollars of the Qing Dynasty

and the Republic, banknotes used in the liberated areas before 1949 and those issued in the years following the founding of the People's Republic. The price of some coins and banknotes have appreciated to several hundred fold their face value. Replicas are available at a low price to satisfy those, to whom the genuine ones are beyond their purses.

In the antique market there are Tang-dynasty tricoloured glazed pottery, cloisonné, lacquerware, bamboo articles, stage costumes and folk handicrafts as well as Mao Zedong badges and books of his quotations, grain coupons, etc. Having either an artistic or historical value these items are becoming increasingly attractive to antique collectors. 

Translated by K.V. Ku
Photos & Text by Xie Guanghui

1. Abundant commodities from both the north and the south
2. This big tortoise is large enough to carry an adult on its back.
3. Brisk business at the medicinal herb market
4. Ancient coins at the Qingping Market satisfy the needs of every collector.
5. Purple sand tea pots mostly originate from Jiangxi's Yichang.





The "Stone Fiend" and the Rare Stones Museum

Photos by Jin Kelin
Article by Xiao Su



● "Chrysanthemum"
Without any artificial creation, this wonderful replica of a chrysanthemum is made entirely by nature.



A dinosaur fossil
found in Guizhou



Xiang Kesheng washing the stones



Xiang Kesheng and the largest rock in his collection, "Nüwa Mending the sky".

In Guilin there is a "stone fiend", whose name is Xiang Kesheng. By day he is the deputy head of the Guilin Labour Bureau, but in his spare time, he is a passionate collector of stones. His home is full of those he has gathered over the past 20 years: in the drawing room, the study, under the bed, in cupboards — everywhere has some sort of rock formation placed in it. Even the pillow he sleeps on is a stone which is known as "Pillow Stone". Although he has a room set aside for his huge collection, it has not proved big enough, and he has had to put stones anywhere he can find: in the bicycle shed or on the roof of his house. To the Xiangs, ornaments are unnecessary; the various beautifully-shaped rocks displayed in the house are tasteful decorations in their own right.

Whenever Xiang Kesheng talks about his stones, he speaks of them as if they were his family treasures, carefully explaining which are cobbles, which are ink stones, which are stalactite, and which are fossils from the Paleozoic Era. He has a collection of more than 800 pieces from six countries (China, Myanmar, Japan, Russia, Germany and Vietnam) and 12 provinces, including Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, Hunan and Shandong.

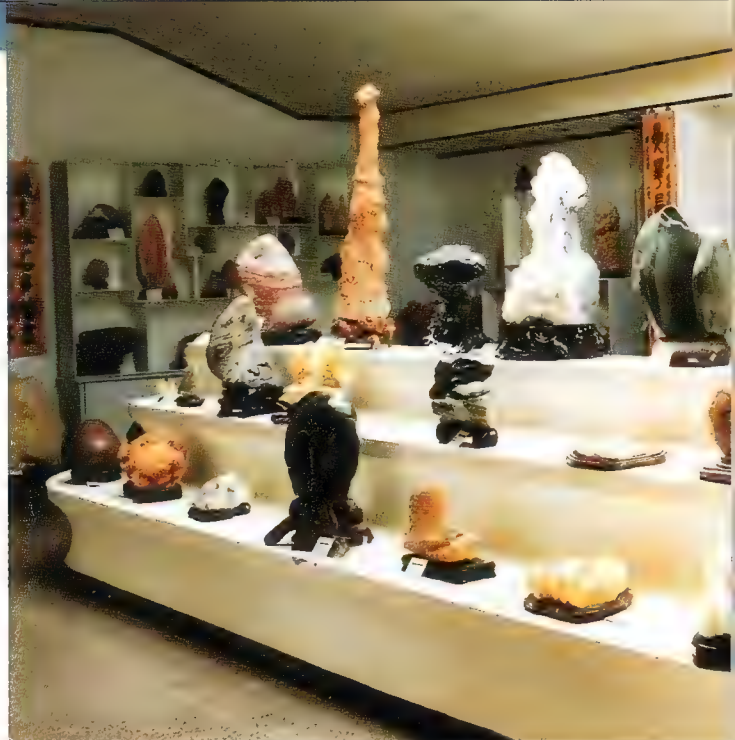
In fact, to form his collection, Xiang Kesheng went through much hardship and some danger, although he never felt it. While still serving in the army and travelling with the troops from Guangxi via Guangdong to Hunan, he always carried stones in his backpack. Once, to get hold of a particularly special rock, he went twice to a town in the suburbs of Guilin and spent a whole month's salary to buy it. He spent many of his holidays looking for stones in remote countryside. Once he discovered a rock, weighing more than 15 kilograms, on the top of a mountain beside the Lijiang River in Guilin. He gritted his teeth and carried it down the mountain, despite spraining his ankle on the way. Sometimes, on hearing that there was a rare stone at a certain place, he would catch the bus the same night to go there to get it. "While I have the stone on my mind, how can I stay still at home?" he would say.

Xiang Kesheng collected pieces not only within China but also abroad. He gathered 10 stones in April 1993, when he was in Japan, and 37 stones in October 1993, when he visited Russia and Germany. Each of his visits abroad was very fruitful.

By this time, Xiang Kesheng ranked first amongst Chinese collectors of rare stones in both quantity and variety. As his collection increased, he

● **"Riot of Purple Light"**

The many faults in the amethyst cause variegated purple layers and shades.



A corner of the exhibition hall in the Rare Stones Museum

● A miniature landscape



● **"Ball of Fire"**

This coral stone's shape, as well as the different specks and grains in it, suggest a ball of flames.

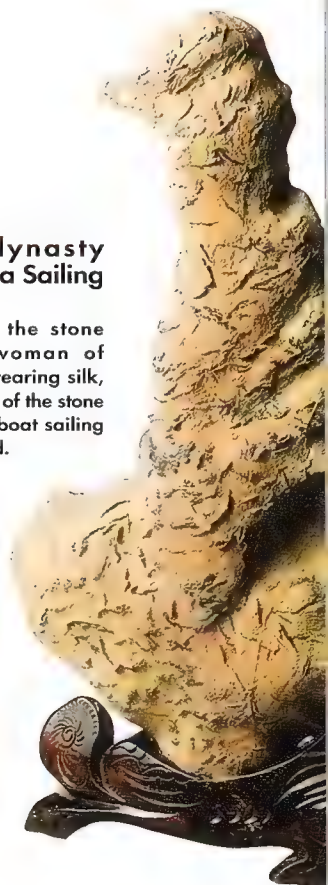
● A wonderful handicraft from nature



● **"A Han-dynasty Woman on a Sailing Boat"**

The shape of the stone suggests a woman of ancient times wearing silk, while the grains of the stone tell she is on a boat sailing against the wind.

● **"Clouds"**





● **"Red Leaves of the Fragrant Hills"**

This piece of stalactite reminds Beijing viewers of the Western Hills in Beijing, which are covered by red leaves in late autumn. The stone is made of a rare quartz.



● **"Mother and Son"**

thought how wonderful it would be if a rare stones museum was built in Guilin so that he could exhibit all those he had gathered. He also felt that this would counteract the sad fact that beautifully-shaped stones were not sufficiently appreciated by the city, despite its mountains and waterways being the finest that he knew. Some people said that he was dreaming. But he thought that the dream could be realised through effort. Sure enough, a rare stones museum was successfully constructed right under Camel Peak, inside Seven-Star Park in Guilin. The museum is fairly large, occupying an area of 2,600 square metres. With a beautiful garden, containing ponds and osmanthus trees, it looks like a traditional Guangxi house. Inside the museum are four exhibition halls and some shops. Xiang Kesheng himself is president of the museum.

In Xiang Kesheng's view, each of the uniquely-shaped stones displayed embodies the essence and spirit of nature. To him, each object in the museum has a story to tell, and can inspire artistic enjoyment and enlightenment. In some of the rocks, people can see famous mountains and great rivers, envisage the terrain north of the Great Wall, or be reminded of the roaring sea.

In the last 20 years Xiang Kesheng has spent all his spare time gathering and appreciating stones. Among the 2,000 pieces he has collected, several dozen are unique and cannot be found anywhere else in the world. The largest one, "Nüwa Mending the Sky", is two metres wide and one metre high. The highest one, "The Red River", is 1.5 metres high; the heaviest one, weighing two tons, is a piece of stalactite; and the smallest one is only a few inches high. The photos show only a few examples. Those who would like to get a whole picture of the collection should go to visit the museum to see for themselves.

N A T U R E

Astronomers Worldwide





Flock to Mohe

Photos & Article by Liu Xiangyang

- 
1. The eclipse at different stages
 2. Getting ready for the shoot
 3. The tiny Hale-Bopp Comet approaches the earth once every 3,000 years.



On March 9 this year, two exceptional phenomena occurred simultaneously at Mohe, known as China's "North Pole". The first was the sighting of the Hale-Bopp comet, and the second was a solar eclipse. Seeing a comet of this size is something that only happens once in a thousand years, and the solar eclipse happens only once every hundred years or so. To have both happen simultaneously is extremely rare.

A Train full of Astronomers

As someone very keen to see this spectacle, I set off from Harbin on March 5, catching the earliest train. To my surprise, the train was already full of people, all, like me, heading for Mohe. At Jiagedaqi in Inner Mongolia where we changed trains, I decided not to leave the station but to follow the streams of passengers straight onto the train bound for Mohe. On board there were more sky-watchers, some from as far away as the United States, Japan and Belgium. It really looked like an international train.

Every House Becomes a Hotel

The train arrived in Mohe in the evening of the same day. With several thousand of us suddenly descending on this small county town with a population of only 40,000, it became fairly crowded. The few hotels, inns and guesthouses were soon full, whilst over a thousand visitors were left without a place to stay. Some of them resorted to the train, still at the railway station, as temporary accommodation. When they heard of this, some quick-witted local residents immediately put up signboards and turned their homes into guesthouses for the new arrivals, and provided them not only with lodging but also with three meals a day. The transformation was remarkable. These households had become small businesses overnight. There were special benefits to be had from taking advantage of such accommodation. Although the

villagers' houses looked ordinary on the outside, inside there were the traditional heated walls, heated brick beds and warm fireplaces, and it was extremely cosy. Once indoors you could hardly imagine that there could be ice and snow outside, where it was minus 30-40°C.

The Border Disappears

When I went to have a look at the Heilongjiang River, there was not a drop of water to be seen. The river was completely frozen over. A villager told me that the ice here was more than a metre thick and could sustain any freight truck that was driven over it. As a result, the river which normally acted as the border here between China and Russia had turned into a broad thoroughfare. Chinese soldiers had erected a wooden board on the main crossing point, with the inscription: "This is the border. Please halt!" Lots of people came up to



the sign to take pictures. Some mischievous children took a few steps over the marked border so as to become "illegal intruders" in Russia.

All Eyes to the Sky

On March 9, just a little past 3:00 a.m., we all got up to go outside. This had been advised as the best time to sight the Hale-Bopp comet,

which only approaches the earth once every 3,000 years. Finally everyone succeeded in finding it. The only disappointment was that the comet looked smaller than we had imagined.

After breakfast, hundreds of us went in a huge drove down to the banks of the Heilongjiang River. Next to the boundary marker was a sign with the inscription "China's North Pole". It was here that journalists from all over the world set up their telescopes and cameras, while astronomers and other enthusiasts got ready their eclipse-observation cards, dark lenses, darkened glasses and even dark handkerchiefs, to put in front of their eyes. They all eagerly waited the moment when the sun and the moon were to cross over each other.

The Total Solar Eclipse

Just a little past eight in the morning, the sun dimmed slightly.



Then it began shrinking, as if being slowly nibbled away. The dark breach increased until only a thin crescent of brilliance remained. Just over an hour later, the sun was completely eclipsed. The sky had become pitch black, even darker than on a moonless night, with only the moon visibly

darker than it. The sky looked as if a black hole had been cut in it, surrounded by a dim silver lining. Astronomers call this phenomenon a solar corona.

A Finger Stuck on the Camera

With the eclipse, there was a sudden drop in temperature. It felt extremely cold. A piercing wind penetrated my thickly padded overcoat, making me shiver. But I kept on taking photos. It was so cold that my finger became stuck to the push button of the camera. When I tried to separate it, some skin was taken off my finger and left on the camera! My two hands were so numb with cold that it was as if they did not belong to me.

The Sun Comes Out Again Amidst Cheers

At 10:15, the sun finally emerged from the shade of the moon and its rays spread over the land of Mohe again. The change that I felt was immediate: suddenly my whole body was much warmer. We all marvelled at the wonderful heat and power of the sun. All the people on the riverbank burst out rejoicing, laughing, jumping, rubbing hands – celebrating the return of the sun which had driven away the deathly cold brought about by its eclipse.

Amidst lots of happy chattering, we began to leave the bank of the Heilongjiang River and head back to the village. On the way I thought to myself: we have many years yet to enjoy the wonderful sun; we are extremely lucky. Although a total solar eclipse is instantaneous and is predictable, the barren darkness and cold it brings have left a deep impression on me.



Translated by Xiong Zhenru



1. Visitors enjoying some local kebabs
2. Though it is already March, there is still no sign of spring in Mohe.
3. The frozen Heilongjiang River seems to have obliterated the border between China and Russia.

C H A L L E N G E S

TALES OF A LONE TRAVELLER

Conquering yet another peak

Photos & Article by Liu Dong

Inspired by a love of photography and a passion for studying folk customs, Liu Dong embarked on an adventure few would undertake. Moreover, he did it alone and on foot. He crossed the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, China's highest region of flat land and known for its harsh conditions.

Armed with an adventurous spirit and some previous experience of travelling alone, Liu Dong began his journey in Yushu, in south-east Qinghai Province. He trekked through Baitang, Da Surmang, Juella and then followed the Ngomqu River, a tributary of the Lancang River, to reach Domba, 5,000 metres above sea level. The most unforgettable part of his trip was passing through the East Tibet Valley, an area totally devoid of road. His challenging trip lasted 51 days until he finally arrived in Qamdo.

Setting Off

In the evening of August 31, I attended a farewell party which had been organised for me.

After seeing off my friends (all of whom tried to persuade me to cancel the trip) I stayed a few minutes longer to stare towards the dark horizon of the grassland. I felt overwhelmed by what was ahead of me, and my mind became numb.

The next morning, my mind was made up. I put on my travel gear and set off over the grassland.

Unbearable Loneliness

Even though it was only September, biting winds swept over the land before me. Standing on Ekari Ridge, which is 4,300 metres above sea level, I looked out over the Yushu Grassland. It was so vast that I could not see beyond it. The low clouds, drifting across endless expanses of sky, and the friendliness of the Tibetans, together with their sacred monasteries, brought great pleasure to me. At dusk, as I walked on the soft, velvet-like grass, I experienced a feeling similar to that of tenderness for the land beneath me. Between Baitang and Da Surmang, the land was covered with withered yellow grass about one foot high, and the setting sun tinged it with a myriad of illuminated crests. Occasionally, I spotted a few gazelles here and there but otherwise nature seemed to be enveloped in its own sweet dream.

Having walked out of town of Xiangda, I gradually left the Yushu Grassland behind me. I rested at a tiny town called Baiza for a couple of days, during which time I became friendly with a Tibetan called Qinmo, his family and a Muslim hunter Uncle Ma. On September 28, it was time to leave and they came to see me off. Uncle Ma had drawn me a map from memory which would lead me in the right direction for my trip to Domba, the source of Ngom Qu tributary belonging to the Lancang River.

There was no road to follow, so I was completely dependent on my compass for direction. For an experienced lone traveller like myself, overcoming the physical hardships of a journey is nothing compared to the psychological effects of seeing nothing but miles and miles of barren land. This is much harder to bear. I would walk for miles without seeing a single soul or even a tree. I could yell at the top of my voice into the wilderness and there would be no echo.

Wolves

On one particular day, I had walked goodness knows how many miles when suddenly I spotted what looked like a wild dog. I could not help gasping in astonishment. As I continued walking, it followed me, completely silent. It walked when I walked and stopped when I stopped. I started to wonder why it never barked. Then it occurred to me that it could be a wolf. I was suddenly gripped by fear and started to quicken my pace. The wolf, along with my recollections of wolf horror stories, accompanied me till dusk. When it was time to set up camp for the night, I began to construct my camping area as some sort of fortification. Once I was well-entrenched inside the tent, I peeked through the door. The wolf was still outside and was staring straight at the tent. Somehow I felt intimidated, and decided to tease it. I took out my torch and flashed it at the animal. Startled by the bright light, it fled. But it soon returned and resumed its position.

The next morning, when I opened the tent flap, there were three wolves there. They sat nuzzling each other's necks, perhaps discussing how to divide up my body. I hurriedly gathered up my things and set off. I left some dried beef on the ground in the hope of distracting them, but they simply took one sniff at it and turned to follow me again.



Ascending a mountain



Finding the right angle

Now, I felt as if nothing but a short space separated me from death – I had no defences against them and nowhere to run to. Still, I decided that no matter what, I would not allow myself to become food for wolves. I walked as fast as I could. Around three o'clock that afternoon, I finally came across some rather delapidated houses at a place called Juella. I rushed into one of the buildings and jostled the Tibetans I found inside and pointed nervously at the wolves outside.

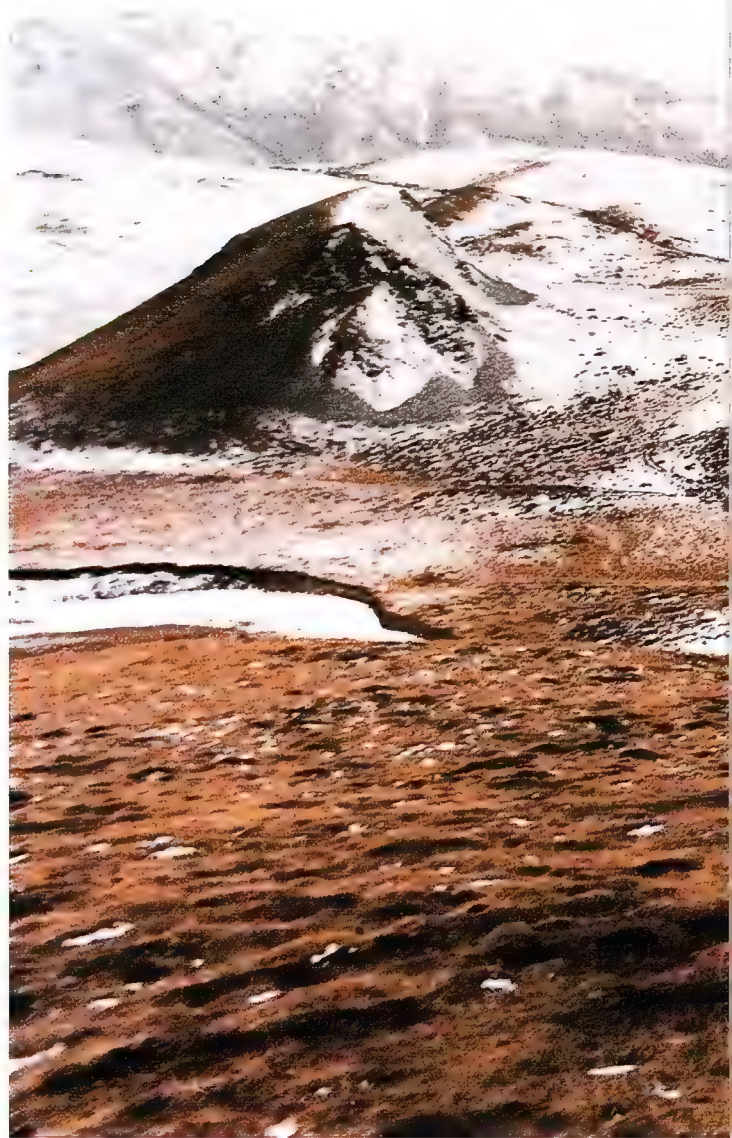
The next morning I started to pack my things ready for the next leg of the journey but was stopped by the Tibetans. They told me that I should not leave that day. More wolves would come, maybe five or 10 of them, and once formed into a pack they would then make their kill. However, if I stayed on an extra day in the village, they would assume I was staying for good, and would automatically look for food elsewhere.

Crossing the Ngomqu River

After two days I was on the road again. I started talking to myself because I was afraid that I would lose my voice from so much silence. It was also a way of encouraging myself. Several days had passed and my travel shoes were so worn out that I had to re-bind the soles to the uppers in order to carry on.

I reached the source of the river Ngomqu, 5,000 metres above sea level. The vast and wild terrain around me was overwhelming. The moon cast an eerie glow across the desolate landscape and it hung so low in the sky that I felt as though I could reach out and touch it. For several hundred kilometres, there was no trace of human settlement. The wind howled as it raced across the highlands, and the hundreds of Tibetan Buddhist prayer flags fluttered. Animals, which I could not see, let out miserable cries.... I pushed on using my spade as a walking stick.

I again had to look for shelter for the night. It was dark by the time I had finally managed to find a deserted sheep shed. I then set about



A river twisting through the valley

gathering pieces of dung to make a fire. I ate some food that I had brought and lit a cigarette. I sat cross-legged like this, until dawn.

On October 8, a sudden snow fall brought both coldness and beauty. I struggled to keep warm as I set out in the morning, but by noon the sun was so hot that it burned overhead like a fire. At around two o'clock in the afternoon, I met the Ngomqu River again, only to find that it blocked my path. Although the river was only a little over 30 metres wide, the flow was turbulent. I desperately tried to find a way to cross it. Finally, I came across a sheep shed standing by the river,



inside of which I found an old vine-bark boat, riddled with holes, and an old truck tyre. I cut the tyre into long pieces and used them to cover the sides of the boat. At either end, I joined the pieces together with safety pins and my shoe laces. Next, I lined the inside of the boat with my tent and tied my photographic gear securely inside. I then jumped into the freezing water and pushed the boat across the Ngomqu River.

A Lonely Tibetan

When I came to Gaiyang, a settlement belonging to 16 families of herdsmen, I ventured into one of the houses and spoke to an old

man with a white beard. I learned that he used to be a primary school teacher. His wife had died after giving birth to their only daughter. The girl was raised by their relatives in Jiegu Town, did very well at school and was able to enter a university for ethnic minorities. After she graduated she went to work in Zhuhai, a coastal city in Guangdong Province, and had wanted her father to join her. But the old man insisted on staying on the land where he had been born and raised. A few days ago, he had received a letter from his daughter, telling him that on this very day she would get married. Sitting by the fire, the old



1. The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau at sunset

2. An immense land

man drank a toast to his absent daughter, wishing her well on her wedding day. He looked so sad and lonely that his mood affected me and made me homesick.

In the afternoon of October 16, while sitting on a rock by a river, I suddenly had the urge to take a bath. Looking at my reflection in the water, I decided that I definitely needed one! My clothes looked ragged and my hair was a tangled mess, with so much grass and leaves in that it looked like a bird's nest. I had lost weight and my face was now much thinner. There were red blotches on my skin and dark circles under my eyes. In places, my skin was peeling off, and my lips were dry and cracked. I stripped off and jumped into the river.

Afterwards, I stretched out on the bank of the river and basked in the sunshine. I gazed at the pure white clouds overhead as they drifted across the clear blue sky, listening to the relaxing sounds of the river in the background.

An Unexpected Birthday Party

The upper reaches of the Ngomqu River flow through flat, rugged terrain. At Gaiyang, further downstream, the water is hemmed in by steep cliffs, causing the river to surge forward with increasing momentum and creating a thunderous roar. Beyond this area it ambles through grasslands dotted with Tibetan tents and Mongolian yurts.

At around dusk one evening, I ventured into one of the Tibetan tents and was warmly received by an elderly Tibetan woman. She invited me to come in and sit on a mattress by the fire. She then handed me a wooden bowl containing butter tea and roasted qingke barley. Just then I heard the sound of a horse galloping towards the tent. The flap opened and a tall, slim Tibetan girl entered. She was surprised to see me sitting there. I quickly stood up and introduced myself. I showed her my ID card which she examined very carefully and then showed it to the older woman. They exchanged a few words in Tibetan, which I could not understand. Then, with a smile, she handed the card back to me. From the conversation which followed, I learned that the girl's name was Soima, and that after finishing junior secondary school in Qamdo, she had come back here to tend the animals with her mother and brother. The older woman started to make a quilt ready and smiled at me. The girl translated: "My mother said you can sleep now. It's safe here." I soon fell sound asleep, thanks to a combination of travel fatigue and the qingke barley wine.

At about six o'clock the next morning, I woke to see my clothes hanging on a line by the fire. They had all been washed and my torn jeans had been mended. I could not find the right words to express my gratitude.

When I returned to the tent around noon time, I found both ladies and some children were working busily. They all nodded and smiled at me. Inside the tent, Soima pulled me to sit down and two older women poured me a bowl of butter tea. A few girls and some children stood outside the tent and I wondered what was going on. Just then, my host



Morning on the grassland

ceremoniously cut a piece of sheep's tail and handed it to me. I immediately thanked her but insisted that she have it. Just then, Soima whispered to me: "Do you know what day it is today?" "Is it some kind of Tibetan festival?" I asked her. "Today is your birthday!" Soima reminded me. That's right! October 17 was my birthday. "I saw the date on your ID card when I looked at it yesterday. I know birthdays are very important to the Han people, especially when you are away from home." Soima said bashfully.

The kindness of these people, after days of loneliness in the wilderness, was too much for me. Tears welled up my eyes and flowed down my cheeks. I had never expected to spend my 33rd birthday in such a tranquil valley setting and surrounded by such lovely people wishing me well. Holding the bowl of butter tea between my shaking hands, I knelt in front of my Tibetan hostess and called her: "Ahma!" (This means something like "mother".) She held my arms and smiled warmly.

Arriving in Qamdo

It was a sunny day when I arrived in Qamdo on October 21. Fifty-one days had passed since I had left Yushu. At times my journey had brought me close to danger and that I had travelled across some of the most desolate land in China, but I had finally reached safety. This was an unforgettable experience.

Translated by F. Huang



LOVE GOD, LOVE LIFE, PURSUE HAPPINESS — STUDENTS IN A CHRISTIAN SEMINARY

Photo by Xie Guanghui Article by Zhou Xiaoping

Visitors to Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province, may have not noticed that right in the north-west corner of the city's bustling business area is a world infused with quietude and purity. Here the famous Jinling Harmony Seminary, a training institute for Christian clergy, is situated.



loves people!"

The centre was developed on the basis of the former Jinling Girls' Seminary, which was established in the early 20th Century. In 1952, 13 seminaries in East China merged to become the present institute here in Nanjing.

Inherited Christian Influence

The 167 students currently studying in the seminary come from all the provinces and autonomous regions in China except Qinghai and Tibet. Undergraduate students have all been recommended to study here by their parishes. All with senior secondary school education, they also have passed the national university entrance examinations. The post-graduate students are either outstanding students selected from classes graduated here or accomplished clergy recommended by their missions – all have to pass selective examinations. Their living expenses during studies at the seminar are borne by their respective churches and their families. Students whose families are in financial difficulties usually receive a stipend from the seminary.

Why did these students choose to study theology instead of physics, business management, electronics or something else?

One of the students, Huang Jixin, finds the major he has chosen very worthwhile. Huang believes that theology, which embodies noble learning, is training him in the inspiring cause of saving the people. Born in 1962, Huang inherited his Christian beliefs from his father, now a retired teacher, and his mother, a housewife. After he graduated from the chemistry department of the prestigious Zhongshan University in Guangzhou, Huang found a job as an engineer in his hometown, Shantou. But eventually, Huang's desire to study theology became so strong that he decided to give up the promising career and enrolled in the Jinling Harmony Seminary in order to follow his true beliefs. About half of the students at the seminary have decided to take theology as their major due to inherited Christian beliefs. Most of the others developed their interest after having heard some church sermons.

A Rich Curriculum

The seminary provides the students with a rich curriculum which includes various areas of theological studies such as ancient mission history, systematic theology, mission theology, history of Christian thought, introduction to modern theology in the West, Jesus' life and teachings, selected readings of theological works, sermon preaching, the New Testament in Greek, Old Testament in Hebrew, history of the transformation movement, introduction to the New Testament, introduction to the Old Testament, hymn singing.... These subjects fill more than half of the syllabus. But there are also other subjects taught here, such as Chinese language, general logic, English, contemporary Chinese history, history of Chinese philosophy and legal studies.

The students also take classes of aesthetics and physical



education. They have a broad interest in sports and train in football, volleyball, basketball, badminton, table tennis, gymnastics, weight lifting and martial arts. Some of them even have reached professional levels in certain areas. As a result of the close link between theology and the arts, the seminary pays particular attention to training students in music and fine

art. Consequently all students are very good at interior decoration and singing. The students' interest in music is by no means confined to hymns, they also love country music, disco and rock and roll.

The centre, just like other universities, has a very active students' union which often hosts seminars on a wide range of topics, holds art shows and parties.

Frequent Religious Activities

One Sunday morning, I went to the church on Mochou Road near the seminary. There, inside and outside church, I saw a group of Jinling students busying themselves by issuing programme sheets, meeting devotees, serving as ushers.... When a student in the post-graduate programme of the seminary, dressed in a black robe, went onto the stage, a hush fell on the congregation, with everyone looking up, ready to hear his sermon.

I learned that, apart from attending relevant classes, students also take an active part in daily religious activities which is a great help in their theological studies. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday, the seminary holds a collective morning prayer from 7:30-8:00, where, together, students and staff sing hymns, read the Bible and listen to a sermon. On Monday evening, from 6:30-7:30, teachers test their students' knowledge of the Bible. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings, from 6:30-7:00, it is the time for evening prayer. Friday evening is for students to exchange views. Saturday afternoon



is devoted to hymn practising. On Saturday and Sunday, students also visit churches and fellow Christians.

Deep Love for Life

People may feel curious about these students. Since they are closer to God and perhaps, by implication, receive more protection from God, they may be different from other

members of society – either commanding more respect or being misunderstood.

In fact, theological students are just like anybody else, loving life and pursuing happiness. On the campus of the seminary, I saw these young people dressed in ordinary blue jeans, casual sportswear, bright sweaters, smart T shirts and various designs of shoes and sports footwear. They look just the same as everybody else. They only appear obvious theology students when they are dressed in white robes singing hymns or when they go on the stage to preach what they have learned.

If there is anything particularly different about these students, it is the world of God in the midst of their hearts.

Translated by F. Huang



1. Huang Jixin has given up his career as an engineer in order to study theology.
2. The atmosphere in the classroom is very relaxed.
3. The main building of the seminary
4. The seminary's library provides students with an avenue to the world of knowledge.
5. A hymn singing class



A MASTER TEA MAKER IN CHENGDU

I took a few of my friends to tea at the Heming (Crane Singing) Teahouse in Chengdu. As soon as we had sat down and placed our order, a middle-aged waiter immediately came over to our table. In one hand he held a tea kettle, in the other, teacups. Before we knew it, he had distributed the lotus leaf-shaped saucers as if he were dealing a pack of cards – one landed directly in front of each of us. Next he began to serve the tea. Holding a teacup in his left hand, with its lid resting on one side of the cup, he made a very slight dip with the long-spouted kettle in his right hand. The movement spat out just enough tea to fill up the cup. One of my friends, a regular at this teahouse, told me that this very waiter was the famous Wu Dengfang and that the movement he had just performed was called “Flying Dragon Spitting out the Dew”.

A Waiter in the Limelight

I had heard a great deal about Wu and the reputation he had acquired because of his unique skills. In 1992, he was invited by a newly-opened restaurant called Tianfu Food City in Beijing to show off his tea serving art. Working there for three months he became a sensation in the city. Both the

Central China Television and the Beijing Television did features on him. These reports brought him more fame and more customers.

In September of the same year, he was invited to join a Chinese delegation to participate in an eight-day international art festival in Melbourne, Australia. Again, his tea serving performance caused a sensation and drew thousands of spectators. Apparently, Mr. Meldrum, the Mayor of Melbourne, was astounded by his technique as well as his tea.

What amazes me most is that Wu Dengfang still continues to do his old job at the teahouse even though he is now famous. I was dying to ask him to perform all of his tricks for us but since there were a lot of customers and he was busy I did not want to bother him, so I simply sipped my tea quietly and watched him at work.



1

Some customers at the next table were leaving and I figured it was time to watch how he cleared the table. I turned around and saw him working at a fast but easy pace. First separating the teacup covers, the teacups and the saucers, he then placed his five fingers among the tea sets and firmly grasped 14 to 15 sets in one hand. The way that he gripped the tea sets made the whole stack into the shape of a curved shrimp. Wu walked steadily towards the kitchen with the “bent shrimp” in hand. “Look!”, cried one customer, “it’s the Inverted Golden Bells!”. Many of the guests, just like me, were totally dumbfounded at what we had just seen.

Later, while Wu continued to serve us tea, I chatted with him and, having sensed my genuine interest in his craft, he invited me to his home the next day so that we could talk further.

I arrived at the Niushikou bus stop as planned and saw Wu Dengfang already waiting for me by a tea stand. He ordered a pot of water and place some tea which he had brought with him into the pot. The brew consisted of some Chinese wolfberry fruit, some liquorice roots and some tea leaves. “Sadly, red dates are not in season yet, otherwise we could

have had the Eight-Treasure Tea", he said. I had heard that he also mixes tea leaves with several dozen Chinese medicinal herbs to create special teas good for maintaining one's physical condition. The concoction he had made certainly did have a unique taste.

After the tea he took me back to his house. He lived in a simply furnished three-room apartment which he had moved into for about a year. Although it was an old building he was very happy with it. Among the framed pictures, I noticed one of him dressed in traditional costume posing alongside the mayor of Melbourne – Wu was smiling broadly. There were also other photographs of Wu in Beijing, performing or posing with other dignitaries.

Apart from tea, Wu also loved to drink wine and liquor. It was his habit to drink a couple of small cups each day. He brought out some wine cups and a plate of peanuts, apologising that he didn't have anything more substantial to offer me. "Let's drink as we chat," he said. The drink livened our conversation and gradually he began talking about his earlier experiences.



Wu had a difficult early life. At the age of eight, he returned to live in his hometown in the countryside. At nine, his mother died. At 10, he dropped out of school and at 14 he began to work as a farmer. One year his village who was building an aqueduct badly needed an elbow joint for the water pipes, but could not find one. He found a stone roller and managed to chisel it into the elbow joint which joined the pipes perfectly with the help of some cement put at both ends.

In 1979, his father, who had been working as a teahouse waiter since the age of

13, retired from the Crane Singing Teahouse in Chengdu. Wu, then 29, moved to the city to take on his father's old job. Wu was as determined to master the skill of pouring tea as he had been to find a solution for the elbow joint. Wu insisted on learning the skill of holding more than a dozen tea sets in one hand and, once accomplished, he renamed it with a vivid term "Inverted Golden Bells".

Wu's other techniques include picking up 25 tea sets in both arms – 75 pieces in all, "Hoisting a Pagoda" (single-handedly holding 10 tea sets filled with tea), and others. Unfortunately, time did not allow me to witness all of his techniques but those I saw were amazing.



*Photo & Article by Huang Yanhong
Translated by F. Huang*



1. Photos taken during Wu's visit to Australia
2. "Hoisting a Pagoda" – one of Wu's special techniques (by Chen Jin)
3. The Crane Singing Teahouse is always full.
4. Wu Dengfang's technique for clearing the table – "Inverted Golden Bells"
5. "Flying Dragon Spitting Out the Dew" – this is how Wu serves tea.





2

C U S T O M S

WEDDING CEREMONY OF THE NINE CLANS FISHER FOLK

I arrived at the Xin'an River in Zhejiang and, at the last minute, decided to join a tour where I would see a wedding between a couple belonging to the Nine Clans fisher folk. The ceremony, which took place on the water, was to be an unforgettable experience for me.

Amidst a deafening sound of gongs and drums, a colourfully decorated boat glided towards us from the distance, in the direct path of another beautifully decorated boat. Once the two boats were about one metre apart, firecrackers were set off. The bride, who was gorgeously dressed, with a large piece of scarlet silk covering her head, stepped out of the boat cabin. A few muscular fellows standing at the bow picked her up gently and tossed her over to the approaching boat, where another group of

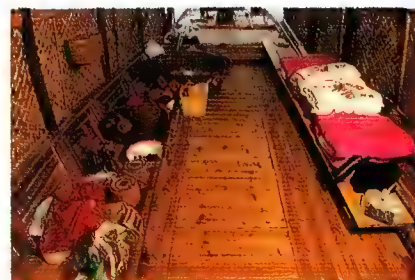
well-built men were waiting to catch her. When she was safely on board, the boatmen gave a light push with their punt poles and the boat carrying the bride sailed away. It circled the centre of the river three times and then came back slowly to moor alongside the other decorated boat. What I had just witnessed was the beginning of the charming wedding ceremony of the Fisher Folk of the Nine Clans.

Origins of the Nine Clans

The Nine Clans were organised into different fisher folk groups in the period between the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) with a total of 2,031 boats. In the Daoguang and Xianfeng reigns of the Qing Dynasty, their boats reduced in number to a little over 1,000. Then, after the Taiping Uprising (1851-1864), their number reduced even further until there were only a few dozen fishing boats left, and the fisher folk of the Nine Clans decreased in number to about 300 households. By 1958, the Fisher Folk who settled along the Xin'an River in Zhejiang were 1,300.

There are different accounts about the origins of the Nine Clans Fisher Folk. One claims they were descendants of Chen Youliang and his followers in the later Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). Another version asserts that the ancestors of the fisher folk were the officials of the perished Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). Over the long course of time these Nine Clans Fisher Folk have lived in relative seclusion on the river with little contact with the outside world and thus have retained many unique customs and habits of their own.

1. The charming wedding ceremony in progress (by Ren Jing)
2. The bride and groom showing their respects to the Heaven and the Earth (by Lin Jianping)
3. The wedding dowry (by Xie Guanghui)



3



1



Wedding on Water

The wedding ceremony I witnessed is totally different from any I had seen on land. It is also one of the customs which have not been altered with the passage of time.

On the day prior to the wedding, the bridegroom must send "dishes" and a dowry to the family of the bride. The "dishes" must be at least eight in number, generally including such things as wine, meat, cloth and silver dollars, and the dowry must include pine firewood and charcoal. After receiving the dowry, the bride's family holds a ceremony to thank the groom's side. Boats are then decorated with lanterns and coloured streamers, and families of both the groom and the bride join together, beating gongs and drums the whole night through.

On the day of the wedding, the first thing that happens is the mother-in-law takes the groom to one side to give him a "lesson". He is advised about such things as how he must live peacefully with her daughter and treat her well all his married life. When the "lesson" is over, the bride and groom begin to *kowtow*, first to the memorial tablets of their ancestors, and then to their parents and elders. The bride is then ushered into a round shallow basket made of bamboo to sit and wait for the appointed hour. Once the auspicious moment arrives, "the ceremony to toss the bride" begins (as described earlier in the article).

After the bride is handed over, a ceremony to worship Heaven and Earth takes place. The bride and groom stand at the bow of the boat flanked by two young girls holding burning candles. On the prow of the boat "the Hundred-Fruit Box" is placed containing auspicious fruits such as red dates, longan, peanuts, lotus seeds and pine nuts. The bride and groom burn incense and then kneel down to *kowtow* toward the sky. When all this is done, the two boats are brought together. This is called "the union of two decorated boats". Then, gangplanks are put in place between the two boats and the friends and relatives of both the bride and groom come across to meet each other and congratulate the new couple. Following is the procedure of

"Washing Face for Unity". First, the bride and groom wash their faces, followed by the groom's parents, uncles, sisters-in-law and sisters. When everyone has finished, it is the time for the bride and groom to enter the bridal chamber. The bride enters from the stern, which is called "married out", and the groom also enters from the stern, which is known as "entering the bridal chamber". Then comes the activity of "stirring the bridal chamber" when friends and relatives come across to make fun and play games with the newlyweds. While teasing them and laughing together with the bride and groom, they do some "stealing" in the bridal chamber. It makes them feel happier if they can make the bride and groom have a sleepless night.

Today, many of the fisher folk of the Nine Clans have settled on land and have completely broken away from life on the water. Although they still keep some of their old customs, they have changed with the times, preferring to marry in the modern way. Nevertheless, the wedding customs of the Nine Clans Fisher Folk with their own special features have become a unique attraction to tourists.

Article by Zheng Xinyu

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

1. The bride – ready to be tossed over
(by Xie Guanghui)
2. Coming across to join the celebrations
(by Xie Guanghui)



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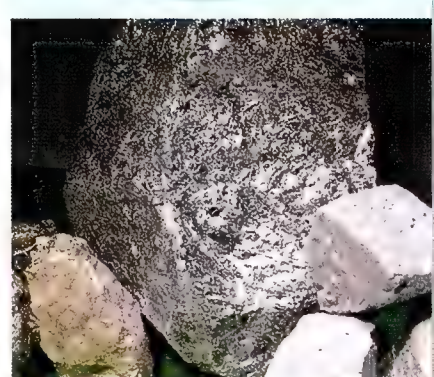
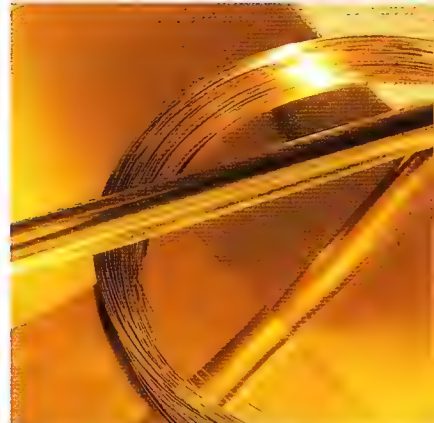
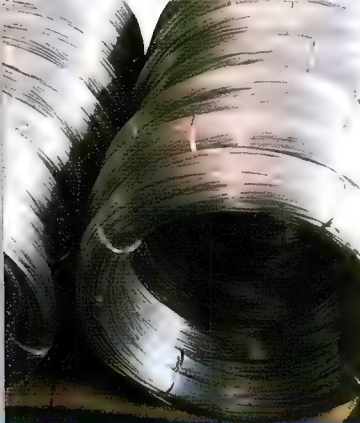
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English Pub Opens

Beijing recently saw the opening of the first traditional English pub, called the John Bull. Located on Guanghua Road, it is a joint venture between Beijing Wanlong Frank's Place Ltd and Allied Domecq Retailing International, based in the United Kingdom.

HK's New Airport to Open Next April

Work has been going smoothly at Hong Kong's new international airport, and the airport will go into service next April as planned, according to the Airport Authority. Rail and road links and a marine tunnel are already under construction, and it will take only 23 minutes to travel from Hong Kong's business centre to the new airport by high-speed train, said Clinton Leeks, the authority's director of corporate development. With shuttle trains and escalators installed in the airport, passengers will need only 30 minutes to go through all check-in and passport control procedures.

Guangzhou-LA Flight Opens

China Southern Airlines started flying from Guangzhou to Los Angeles on July 20. The flight takes 12 to 14 hours. The airline flies a Boeing 777 on the route, which operates three times a week. The company disclosed that it will open another international flight to Brisbane, Australia, in September.

Tunnel of War

Tunnels built by villagers in North China to fight the Japanese during World War II have been renovated and opened to tourists. The 2,000-kilometre network, which used to

link all the households of Ranzhuang village, is about 200 kilometres north of Beijing. A section of 400 metres of the tunnels has been renovated, with demonstration sites using sound and light effects to mimic the wartime atmosphere.

Jump into Hainan

Parachutes have become Hainan Island's latest tourist attraction. The island enjoys 280 days a year of optimum conditions for parachuting and gliding. Two areas for parachuting have been built in Sanya, in the south-east of the island. There are instructors available on site.

Tigers Learn to Lead Wild Life

China is helping 30 artificially-bred Manchurian tigers return to nature, in a move to increase the number of tigers in the wild. The project is taking place near Harbin, in China's northeast Heilongjiang province. The task director said that an important part of the training was to improve the tigers' hunting abilities, which were almost dormant due to their life in captivity. They are being offered farm livestock, such as chickens and cattle, as prey, which they then have to capture themselves. It is hoped that this will re-activate their hunting instincts and skills.

Primeval Forest Saved

Central China has developed a number of nature reserves, one of which, at Bashan Mountain, now protects the only primary forest remaining in Central China. It is one of China's top natural reserves and has been listed by UNESCO as part of the world's key human and biosphere protection network. A second nature reserve in the Qinling mountains, some 50 kilometres south of

Xi'an, is the northernmost habitat of the giant panda. According to a recent survey, the density of giant pandas there is the highest in the country.

Rare Plants Rescued

About 80 per cent of endangered plant species in the Three Gorges Reservoir area have been saved, by moving them to botanical gardens. They were to be in the path of the gigantic hydroelectric project which is currently underway.

Shenzhen's Ports Upgraded

Shenzhen is moving to make its four ports more user-friendly and turning them into first-rate international gateways to China. Before 1995, cargo going through the ports had to pass at least four separate departments, which conducted 367 separate inspections. The delays would last hours. However, in Yantian port, one of Shenzhen's four, customs inspections now last no more than three minutes, compared with the 30 minutes it took in 1995. As a result, vessel-handling capacity there has increased by over 100 per cent. Management changes have been made to end duplication of efforts, and fee payment procedures have been simplified.

Genghis Khan Revived

China has put more than three million yuan (US\$361,000) into renovating a mausoleum honouring Genghis Khan, the Mongolian emperor of the 13th century. The site, near the capital of Inner Mongolia, Hohhot, will also display antiques and a statue of the emperor on horseback. Genghis Khan united the various Mongolian tribes in 1206 and set up a powerful empire, referred to as the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) in Chinese history.

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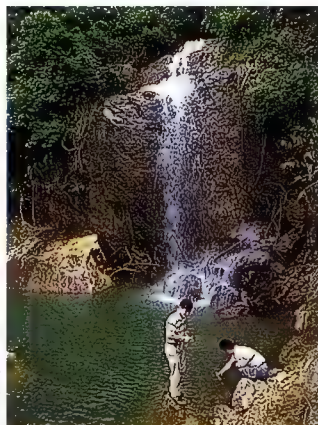
One of our reporters travelled on the **Beijing-Kowloon Railway**,



Shi Baoxiu

the new major communications artery in China, and explored its scenic and historical spots on route. Hong Kong has few fresh water resources. One of those that supplies its 6.3 million people with drinking water is

the **Dongjiang** River, which runs from Jiangxi to Guangdong.



Shi Baoxiu

Then we will take you to a village called **Daocheng**, an

Sichuan, to a village enchanting place nestled in snow-capped mountains.



Chen Jin



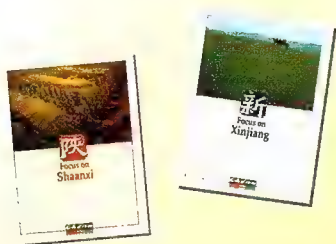
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